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MISS BAGG'S SECRETARY

A WEST POINT ROMANCE

BY CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM

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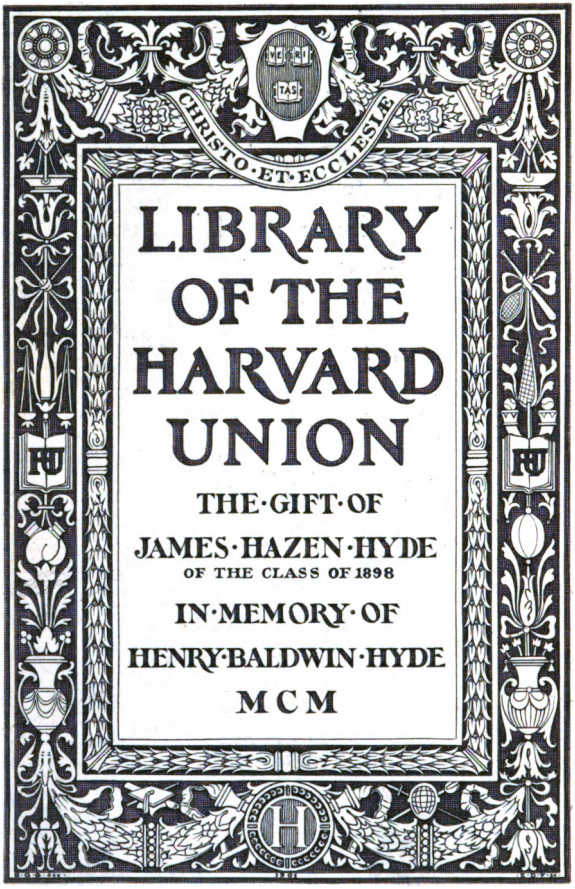

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MISS BAGG'S SECRETARY

A West Point Romance

BY

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge

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MISS BAGG'S SECRETARY.

CHAPTER I.

OLIVE CARLYLE.

NEAR the north window in the back parlor of a house in New York a girl of about nineteen sat before an easel. The sheet spread beneath her chair was well littered with blackened bread-crumbs, and her brow was puckered anxiously as she paused, the hand holding her stump poised in air and her eyes fixed upon the nearly finished crayon portrait before her.

As she sat thus, the faded portière which concealed this room from the front parlor parted, and there entered a thin-faced woman, bonneted and shawled, whose gray eyes shone pleasantly behind steel-bowed spectacles. She smiled at sight of the girl, and because she smiled that dingy back room was a pleasant place to be in.

"Your forehead, Olive," she said warningly. "You are frowning again."

"Never mind my forehead, mother. Come and tell me what is the matter with the Reverend Mr. Wheeler's."

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Mrs. Carlyle came forward, unpinning her gray shawl, which she threw back, while she stood behind her daughter's chair, then rested her hands on the girl's shoulders and silently inspected her work.

"It does look a little one-sided," she remarked meditatively, after a minute.

"I wish people would n't be *bumpy*," exclaimed the perplexed artist ruefully. "He is bumpy. I 'll leave it to you if he is n't in the original," and she lifted the photograph, protected from her smutty fingers by being incased in a large envelope, the front of which had been cut away to expose the pictured face.

"He has a fine phrenological development certainly, but is n't that rather an extra bump you have given him near the left temple?"

The girl dropped her bright head back until it rested against her mother.

"That I did from memory," she answered. "It is an annex which he has recently thrown out to meet the demand upon his brain of the new missionary movement in Siam. I noticed it last Sunday."

Her mother laughed, and began to remove her bonnet. "It is very good, child," she said. "You have a decided gift for getting likenesses."

Olive nodded wisely. "It does n't do to be too exact," she answered. "Remember Cousin Jotham."

"Do you think the truthfulness of his portrait was accountable for his ungraciousness?" asked Mrs. Carlyle, glad to see that her daughter was

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willing to refer to what for a year had been too sore a subject to touch.

"It was partly the truth to nature of his crabbed expression and his network of wrinkles, and partly the fact that I undertook the experiment without your approval. I learned my lesson. It made an exemplary daughter of me."

She began with her pencil to make careful lines in the beard on the crayoned face, and Mrs. Carlyle sat down with some sewing at the other window.

"The idea," continued Olive, "of choosing Cousin Jotham to try my 'prentice hand upon, and then daring to send him the result. Upon my word, looking at it from one standpoint, I take some pride in my temerity. It is a wonder he did not inclose dynamite with the portrait when he returned it; but how it did break my poor little heart at the time! Dynamite could hardly have done more damage."

"I suppose you thought you were doing a shrewd stroke of business," observed her mother.

"Oh, I was sure of it. I expected Cousin Jotham to be touched and delighted with my gift, and to advertise me among all his wealthy friends. Now if I had had the sense to send the old gentleman Max's portrait instead of his own, and the picture had chanced to arrive at a moment when Cousin Jotham was not in one of his periodical rages with his protégé, that might have done some good."

"I have not seen a picture of Max since he

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became a man," remarked Mrs. Carlyle placidly, "but it would be a real pleasure for an artist to copy his face."

Olive smiled. "Then you do not consider the lieutenant too handsome. Some people do."

"No. It is one of my little theories that when the world is in order people will all be beautiful, as they will be virtuous and happy."

Mrs. Carlyle sent a glance through her spectacles at her daughter as she spoke. She had an artist's feeling for all harmony and loveliness. What statuary, rare pictures and costly flowers are in more favored mansions, her only child's beauty was to Mrs. Carlyle in her shabby surroundings, and as a luxurious gift straight from the hand of her Heavenly Father she had taken it, seeing no terror or temptation therein. Perhaps it was this theory of hers that beauty should be the rule and lack of symmetry the exception which had made it possible that so extremely pretty a girl as Olive Carlyle should have so little vanity. Her mother had always treated her good looks as being like her good health, — no more than should be expected.

"Those periodical rages of Cousin Jotham's with Maxwell ceased long ago," continued Mrs. Carlyle, going on with her work. "It seemed to be the beginning of his permanent satisfaction with the boy when Max succeeded in entering the academy at West Point."

"Yes; that was such an economical way for Cousin Jotham to educate him," suggested Olive.

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"No, no, my dear. I am convinced that money did not enter into his calculations in that instance. Cousin Jotham believed in the training and the course of study there. Max's mother talked to me about it."

Olive smiled a little scornfully. "Oh, yes, Cousin Elinor liked the idea of having her son an army officer."

"Of course she did. She and Ida Fuller have had a fine visit with him this summer at his post. They enjoyed all sorts of lively military doings. I was glad to find Ida was beginning to have the heart to be gay again. Poor child!"

"Well, really, mother, in the few times I have met Ida since she came to live with Cousin Elinor I have not perceived that she was a candidate for sympathy."

"Oh, my dear," — Mrs. Carlyle shook her head, — "you will learn in time not to judge by appearances. It is but two years since her husband's suicide. No doubt she often carries a sad heart under that bright exterior. We do not see enough of her to judge."

"No," returned Olive. "We do not see enough of her nor of any of the rest of our relatives to be able to judge of them. They are distant relations with a vengeance. They would be utter strangers if it were not for Cousin Jotham's pride in his pet. I imagine family parties are not much to Max's taste, either. I think they bore him."

"All the more good-natured of him to wear his

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uniform on those occasions and let his civilian relatives admire," replied Mrs. Carlyle tranquilly.

"And how promptly the family falls apart when the magnet is withdrawn," remarked Olive, working on busily. "The only time Cousin Jotham ever troubles himself to pick up the loose ends is when he wants to show off Max. I believe the first gathering of grown-ups I ever attended in my life was six or seven years ago, when Max was at home from West Point on his vacation. How grand Cousin Jotham's big parlors looked to me that night! I had not yet entered my teens, but I felt that this was a fine début into society, and that henceforward all Fifth Avenue was open to me." The girl laughed softly, and her pencil brought out more distinctly the high light in the Reverend Mr. Wheeler's left eye. "After that, no more high life for the poor relations until Max graduated, when we were all asked to inspect the new-fledged lieutenant and tender our congratulations. Since then, let me see: I think we have seen Cousin Jotham's old brocade hangings and young officer twice, relapsing after each orgy into Twenty-fourth Street seclusion. I wonder when the magnet will collect the scattered particles of the family again? Probably as soon as the government considers that the country's safety will not be endangered by a leave of absence from his post of Lieutenant Maxwell Van Kirk of the —th cavalry!" And Olive laughed softly at her own folly. "But I have n't asked you what your adventures were down-town

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to-day. Whom did you give your sprig of rose-geranium to?"

"The palest little girl in Macy's. She liked it."

"I dare say she liked it, but," — plaintively, — "I do wish, mother dear, you would n't take greens with you whenever you sally forth. It looks queer and countrified to go around in the cars as you do with your little bouquets."

"Countrified! Oh, bless you for the compliment, my child. I dream dreams sometimes of living in the country, Olive."

The girl shook her head. "If you felt as I do about it, you would prefer even West Twenty-fourth Street."

Mrs. Carlyle breathed an unconscious sigh. "I could n't leave my girls, of course," she replied.

"Speaking of the girls," said Olive, "the last time they were here you committed even a worse sin than carrying greens. As I was just saying, we have never benefited greatly by relatives, and why should you have such a craving for hunting up new ones? At all events, please don't find any among those shop-girls."

"Olive Carlyle!" Her mother looked and spoke genuine disappointment.

"I am willing to have them here as often as you like, and I will play for them to sing 'There 's Music in the Air,' and play games with them and read to them," said Olive firmly, her face looking childishly flushed above the large blue calico apron that enveloped her, "but I do not care to discover any cousins among them."

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"Cousins!" Mrs. Carlyle still sat with her hands in her lap and her deep-set, beautiful gray eyes gazing at the mutinous face before the easel. "They are your sisters, every one," she said, slowly, "and if you do not love them and yearn over them, what have I been doing all these years?"

"It is n't because they are shop-girls, mother," replied the girl plaintively. "I am nearly as poor as they are and may be glad to be a shop-girl yet myself, but they are boisterous just as soon as they feel at home, and they have n't clean hands, and their bangs cover their eyebrows, — I mean the kind of shop-girl that you always invite to come here."

"Yes, the kind that needs to come here," said Mrs. Carlyle, apparently recovering her calm, and proceeding with her work. "I am never so glad that our carpets are faded and the furniture old and rubbed as when I see how quickly the girls feel at home with us; and it is one of the greatest pleasures I can imagine, to see them enjoying themselves so much and so innocently."

Olive looked across at the transparent face with its unconscious half-smile.

"Don't worry about your own little inner rebellious feelings, daughter," continued the elder woman, "they belong to your youth; every year you will look deeper and deeper into these things. Did n't you notice the other evening that little Ellen Lanyard had combed her hair back and tried as well as she could with her straight locks to arrange it like yours? Despise not the day of small

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things," added Mrs. Carlyle, with her transforming smile. "The lifting up of that heavy bang may mean the lifting up of something more important within."

Olive gave a low groan as she resumed her crayoning. "How does it feel to be an angel, mother?" she asked.

Mrs. Carlyle was too accustomed to her daughter's rebound from resentful protest to filial adoration to do more than smile at this familiar question. "I saw Cousin Elinor and Ida Fuller driving in a coupé as I was coming home in a car," she remarked, after a little pause.

"Did they see you?" inquired Olive quickly.

"No. It is a good while since I have spoken with Elinor. She is doubtless very busy with her social duties. She does not need us."

"Well," said the girl, with a sigh, "lots of people do. They are not exactly the sort of people to help one into society, but still there are lots of them, the lame and the halt and the blind, mentally, morally, and physically; and they each want a little piece of my mother, and, worse than that, they get it." She pushed her chair back. "I must make myself presentable, for some of the congregation may come this afternoon to sit on Mr. Wheeler's picture. They really ought to give me a duplicate order, so as to present Mrs. Wheeler with a portrait at Christmas."

Olive rose and went to a little closet, where she slipped off the enveloping apron and washed her

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face and hands. In a few minutes she reappeared, metamorphosed. As she stepped forth clothed in a clinging cashmere dress, she seemed to prove the theory held by certain artistic souls that only the young and beautiful should wear black. Her fine, smooth skin and youthful tints, her large, expressive blue eyes, her well-carried head, with its yellow-brown, waving hair, were well set off by the simple gown, exactly fitting the round, pliant figure. Her firm, light step seemed fit to fall on velvet or on smooth-shaven terraces where peacocks glitter. All the accompaniments of wealth suggested themselves to the imagination at sight of her, but she had lived too busy and useful a life often to sigh for them in day-dreams, and when the thought of unattainable riches did present itself, it was naturally in connection with the work her mother managed to do for young women; a work for which Mrs. Carlyle's only equipment was her own great heart and clever brain. Their recent talk had brought up this idea of money in the girl's mind.

"If Max does prove to be Cousin Jotham's heir, as his mother and everybody expects he will be, do you think he will be likely to be generous? Won't he perhaps give you some money for your work?" she asked, as she moved the easel and began to gather up the sheet containing the crumbled bread.

"I do not know, of course, whether my work will require money. It evidently has not needed it as yet."

"It has not had it, certainly."

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"The same thing."

"Oh, mother, how can you be sure?"

"Does it seem to you a wonderful thing to believe that the Lord of heaven and earth could send me money if He wanted me to use it? It is such a simple truth."

"Somehow I forget from time to time," replied Olive meekly.

When her mother said such things they always seemed for the moment perfectly clear in the light of her translucent certainty.

"So did I at your age," replied Mrs. Carlyle. "In fact, I forgot nearly all the time."

"Then I suppose I shall receive the order for another picture of Mr. Wheeler, if it is best," remarked the girl half-discontentedly.

"Certainly. Just as surely as that two and two make four."

The door-bell suddenly sent a peal through the house. "There are the arbiters of my fate, probably, now," said Olive, placing the easel in a favorable position. She left the room and hastened to open the front door. So full was her mind of the committee she expected to see that she gave a little involuntary start at sight of the two ladies in full calling costume who were waiting on the upper step.

"Well, Olive, glad to find you at home," said the elder.

"I have come to scold you, Olive," added the younger, smiling and shaking her head.

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To their simultaneous greeting the girl murmured a welcome, and, kissing the cheeks they offered, ushered the visitors into the house. Then she stepped into the back room. "Cousin Elinor and Ida Fuller," she announced distinctly to her mother, who immediately followed her into the parlor.

Mrs. Van Kirk, a large, imposing woman, with prominent brown eyes and large white teeth, came forward in black silk and jet to receive her hostess' cordial welcome, permeating the air with an odor of white rose as she moved.

"Oh, you two unsociable creatures," she said, in a tone as penetrating as her favorite scent. "See how you make me come after you, although you know how busy I am, — driven almost to death."

"Yes," added Mrs. Fuller, a slender, graceful young woman, "I tell Olive that she will positively have to be put out of the clan, if she does not turn over a new leaf."

"We are pretty busy people here," observed Mrs. Carlyle, serenely unmoved by this onslaught, although as conscious as her daughter of its absurdity. "I should like it if we might see more of one another," she continued, looking at Mrs. Fuller with her affectionate, benedictory gaze. "I am one who believes that blood is much thicker than water; witness" — looking back at Mrs. Van Kirk — "the way I have clung to the slender thread of relationship that binds me to your aunt."

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"I am glad you do, Mary," said the elder guest graciously, but with a distinct flavor of patronage. "The slightness of the tie matters little when we consider the friendship of our youth. That will connect us always, although circumstances seem against our continuing our intimacy in these days. But I have come on another errand beside reproaching you for not coming to see me." Mrs. Van Kirk's tight jet armor creaked as she settled back in her chair. "I remember how fond you used to be of Maxwell when he was a child and what an interest you have always taken in him."

"Certainly. What of him?"

"Well, I have great news. He has left the army."

"Is it possible!" ejaculated Mrs. Carlyle, throwing herself unrestrictedly into the mother's interest, and looking at her with as much surprise and attention as though she were listening to news of the resignation of the secretary of war. "And are you pleased, Elinor?"

"The question of my pleasure has been very little consulted," replied Mrs. Van Kirk, dropping her eyelids and drawing in her breath.

"I can tell you very decidedly that I am not pleased, Cousin Mary," declared the young widow, shaking her dark head. "You know I visited Max at his post with Aunt Elinor this summer. I never had a pleasanter time in my life. I am simply disgusted that there is to be no more of it; but neither did Cousin Jotham consult *me*."

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"Ah, Cousin Jotham?" said Mrs. Carlyle, turning inquiringly toward Mrs. Van Kirk.

"Yes; oh, yes," replied the latter, with a subdued air of importance, "it is all Uncle Jotham's doings. You know he is getting to be a pretty old man now, and when he began to feel that he must have Max near him, there was n't much to be said. At first the boy hesitated, of course; but the idleness of his life has always weighed upon him. There is next to no hope, or fear, of active service in the army, and when his Uncle Jotham put it to him as he did, Maxwell finally decided that it was his duty to do as the old gentleman requested."

Mrs. Carlyle nodded. "No doubt he wishes Max to become familiar with the various responsibilities which will devolve upon him later. I am sure we can see Cousin Jotham's wisdom in that. It would be unfair to make the boy take the care of such a complicated property without any preparation."

Mrs. Van Kirk's stiff bodice creaked appallingly. "Oh, of course we know nothing about the future," she said, looking nevertheless as though she did know much which yielded her satisfaction, "but I am well content with Max's decision. I think he did right. The affair has been pending for some time, but matters are settled now, and Maxwell is in town, a civilian once more. We have been very quiet about it during the transition period."

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There was a momentary silence in the room. Then, "I hope he is well and happy," hazarded Mrs. Carlyle.

"Yes, thank you. You know there is no shilly-shallying in Max's nature. He considered and made up his mind, and now there will be no regret, no looking backward," replied the young man's fond parent.

"And the United States has lost one of the handsomest men in the service," remarked Mrs. Fuller, smiling. "Army officers are usually good-looking, though. It seems to have a favorable effect on the features as well as the figure to take a military training."

"The errand I came for especially," said Mrs. Van Kirk, looking from mother to daughter, "is to bring you an invitation from Uncle Jotham."

"I knew it," declared Olive mentally, and she could not forbear giving one look at her mother. Mrs. Van Kirk noted the wandering glance, and fixed the girl with her large gaze as she proceeded:

"Dear Uncle Jotham has lived in almost entire seclusion for so long that you will probably be surprised to learn that he wants all the family for dinner next Wednesday."

There were little sparks of mischief in Olive's eyes. "Has it really come to that?" she asked, with audacious humor. "He has looked for years as though he wanted to eat us all, but I never thought he would avow it and actually set the day for the operation."

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Mrs. Fuller smiled.

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Van Kirk, in displeasure, "respect for gray hairs should make you refrain from treating dear Uncle's invitation as a joke. I assure you," she added reproachfully, "it touched me deeply to think he desired to see all his kin sitting about his board once more before he goes hence," and the speaker touched her eyes with her handkerchief. "Shall I tell him, Mary," — turning to Mrs. Carlyle, — "that you and Olive will be present?"

"Yes, indeed. I suppose it is a dinner-party in honor of Max."

"Well, I suppose it is," assented Mrs. Van Kirk, with becoming modesty. Then she rose in her noisy jet fringes. "We were belated on our way here, and so must tear ourselves away," she said. "It is already growing dark."

"Are you doing well in your art work?" Mrs. Fuller asked of Olive, as she, too, rose.

The girl answered civilly, but was painfully conscious of the open scrutiny with which the young widow's hard, handsome eyes inventoried the old furnishings of the parlor.

"Run in and see me soon, Mary," said Mrs. Van Kirk. "I wish I had a home and could beg you to make a longer stay than a flying visit. It is an unsatisfactory life — this boarding," and she shook her head mournfully.

"It is pleasant for you and Ida to be in the same house," responded Mrs. Carlyle.

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"Oh, I should be a forlorn orphan indeed without Aunt Elinor," said Mrs. Fuller, and with a few more commonplaces the visitors effected their departure.

When the house door had closed, Olive drew her mother into her loving young arms.

"Say something good to me quick," she said. "I am all bristling like a porcupine. Oh, mother, I like you! You are so real and so true."

"Then come down and help me get supper," suggested Mrs. Carlyle, yielding her cheek to the furious kisses her daughter was implanting upon it. "It is quite time. Next Wednesday we shall not have to get our own supper. It seems the young prince is coming into his own."

"Yes," said Olive, releasing her mother and walking across the room with an excellent imitation of Mrs. Van Kirk's imposing, important, dominant air, and speaking in that lady's deliberate, nasal tone. "Dear Maxwell, my dear child — so dutiful to dear Uncle Jotham, so everything he ought to be and nothing that he ought n't — Oh, Ida Fuller is a snob!" exclaimed Olive, stopping in her dramatization and clinching her pretty hands. "What right had she to stare at our poor little belongings? And I know, I *know* she was thinking of the roomers."

Mrs. Carlyle rented rooms to certain inoffensive individuals, and these "roomers," though she rarely laid eyes upon them, Miss Carlyle chose to consider the tragic features of her life.

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Her mother laughed most unsympathetically. "Come, dear; supper-time," she said, leading the way to the basement stairs.

"Well," replied Olive, following, but still much ruffled, "I believe the most trying of all Cousin Jotham's cross-grained eccentricities is this occasional spasm of sociability with his relatives. He must show Max off, whatever happens."

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CHAPTER II.

THE FAMILY DINNER-PARTY.

"It is a real gathering of the clan, you see, my dears," said Mrs. Van Kirk, graciously, giving Olive and her mother each a hand, as on the following Wednesday evening they approached her where she stood by the folding doors in Jotham Bagg's high-studded, spacious old drawing-room, in her temporary character of hostess. "Uncle Jotham," — turning to the permanently frowning old man near her, and speaking with increased deliberation and sweetness,—"here is our fairest bud."

The host shook the girlish hand, as it was offered, with a bony, lifeless touch. "How-d'-ye-do, how-d'-ye-do," he muttered, automatically, scarcely parting his dry lips. His stiff, thick, silvery hair stood erect above his wrinkled face, and his head seemed set immovably in his high white stock, while his black eyes softened not at all as they rested a moment on the young face.

"When I think I sent him that portrait!" reflected Olive, as she moved away. "What has he invited us here for, if it is not to eat us? Do see mother! Would n't that look in her eyes melt a graven image? I wonder what she is saying to

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him; something sweet about Max, probably, for actually the idol is smiling. My! I should think the old gentleman would be afraid of cracking his cheeks; they are so unused to it. I wonder where the ex-lieutenant is. Ah!" — for at this moment a tall man in evening dress entered the room, not with the air of a new arrival, but as though he might have been the son of the house. He caught sight of Miss Carlyle's flushed face and advanced to her with a decided look of interest. "What is this? What is this?" he said, as he shook her hand. "You have been growing up since we last met. Why, when was it? The last time I saw you you were a little girl, with your hair braided down your back."

"Of course," replied Olive gayly. "You did not expect me to remain a child forever, I hope. It is my turn at last to be a young lady."

"I should say so," replied Van Kirk, continuing to look at her with surprise and approval.

"This is a world of changes," she remarked. "I understand we have looked our last on all those adornments Lieutenant Van Kirk once dazzled us with in these rooms."

"Yes; I have n't a brass button to my name. All my dreams of martial glory I left behind me in Wyoming."

"And are you glad, or sorry?" asked Olive impulsively.

The young man hesitated.

"Well," he said at last, "a man does not take such a step without due consideration."

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"Which means," replied Olive, with a pretty look of deprecation, "that I ought not to have asked that. Well, Cousin Jotham gives you a family party as the best compensation for army gayety at his command."

Van Kirk smiled in sympathy with her soft laugh. "It *is* rather an odd freak of the old gentleman's, is n't it?"

Olive nodded. "One which you can explain if anybody can, I suppose."

"Can't, I give you my word. I have n't the least idea. I can only be grateful for the pleasure."

"Rather a questionable pleasure. There are no two of us who meet twice a year. There is n't a common interest among us, — not one. We know each other's names, and that is all. I dare say you could not give the relationship to one another of the people in this room to save your life."

"And I would n't try, for the laudable purpose of retaining my reason."

"Precisely. It is the most absurd gathering I ever heard of."

Mr. Van Kirk smoothed his mustache. "Are you always so uncomplimentary?"

"I am always strictly truthful, and that must usually mean being uncomplimentary while one lives in this world."

Maxwell laughed. The speaker's happy face and gentle tone were so unrelated to her effort at cynicism.

"Now, it strikes me that Uncle Jotham should be

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encouraged in making these little excursions out of his shell," he returned. "How are you, Wilkins?" — this to a short, red-faced individual who clapped him heartily on the shoulder, compelling him to turn around.

"What do you know of army gayety?" he pursued, turning back to Olive as soon as civility permitted.

"Not much, I must say; but Ida Fuller was at our house yesterday, and she said she had the pleasantest visit of her life at your post."

The young man nodded. "Yes, it strikes a stranger, especially a young lady, as a very pleasant life. A visitor knows nothing of the monotony which bears down on one after a certain length of time. You had a perfect right to ask if I was glad to leave the army. I was rusting, that is the fact. I like New York, of course. Under all the circumstances, I am glad to begin life again here."

He looked so handsome and prosperous, standing there beneath the brilliant chandelier, it passed through the mind of his companion that he was indeed an enviable being, a pet of fortune, and that he had done wisely in discarding his shoulder-straps to take up the active career which lay before him.

There was another listener to his declaration, whose sentiments of admiration were lost in the various emotions of anxiety, uneasiness, and jealousy, which the mention only of Van Kirk's name was able to evoke. This was the florid Jeremiah

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Wilkins, who, bowing to Olive, had remained in the neighborhood. No soul in Mr. Bagg's circle of acquaintance had been so deeply stirred by the news of the recall of the young lieutenant as that of this cousin of Jotham's, an habitué of the house and a most servile slave to the old man's whims; but he concealed his sentiments under a bluff, loud, familiar cordiality, and now rested his hand again on the broad shoulder that was turned toward him.

"Of course you feel that way, and right you are, Max," he declared, "right you are!"

"I have not spoken to Ida," said Olive. "Does n't she look as though she had stepped out of an old picture in that crape gown?" and she turned to greet Mrs. Fuller, who advanced, smiling.

Although Mrs. Van Kirk and her son labored nobly to create an atmosphere of harmony amid the inharmonious assemblage, Jotham Bagg's extraordinary dinner-party was rather a grotesque affair. His expressionless face as he sat at the head of his wax-lighted table betrayed no feeling whatever, and beyond answering questions addressed directly to him, he did not exert himself in any way to entertain his guests, whose convulsive efforts to assume an air of good-fellowship might have touched even the heart of their host.

Mrs. Van Kirk's uneasiness was plainly discernible, and to her son, seconded by Mrs. Fuller, was due whatever measure of success was attained in keeping the conversational ball rolling, unless Mr. Wilkins's noisy laughter could be counted an aid.

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No one ever saw Maxwell Van Kirk embarrassed or at a loss, and even under the present depressing circumstances he talked, told anecdotes, and succeeded in drawing responses to his clever questions from the most hopelessly mute third cousin of them all.

But all this was hard work against heavy odds, and it was in answer to an imperative look from him that Mrs. Van Kirk with no unnecessarily prolonged ceremony gave her final gracious smile around the table, and, rising, led the way back to the parlor, the other women following in her rose-scented wake.

There was one guest who, in spite of her strictures upon this eccentric entertainment, was enjoying it highly. Society, beyond church sociables and her mother's labors of love, was an untried pleasure to Olive Carlyle. No wonder she had enjoyed being placed beside Max at the dinner-table and being the recipient of the murmured asides of that much-tried young man.

Now as she took a superannuated album and seated herself on the green brocade sofa near the pier glass in the drawing-room, Ida Fuller took possession of the place beside her.

"Let me sit by you and rest a minute from this woefully stupid set of people," said the widow. "Everybody seems under a spell to-night. I never encountered such obstinate silence."

"I suppose the company cannot recover from their surprise at being invited here."

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Mrs. Fuller shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps that is it. Cousin Jeremiah was odious. I wish I knew how to snub him. He is such a mixture of eagerness and uneasiness. Just one of the parasites you read about. How can he hang so on Cousin Jotham's looks? Every time our host's piercing little black eyes roved around the table, it seemed to me they were saying: 'Oh, I see through you. Poor relations, all of you.' He makes me conscious that every civil word anybody addresses to him is set down in his mind as an effort to win his favor."

"Yes," replied Olive, "and on that account I am rather proud of the sulky front presented by the family to its head."

"We all know it is of no use," said Ida, half-laughing. "Every one is sure that Max will be Cousin Jotham's heir. It is a shame, too. There is so much money, it ought to be divided. Think what a convenient thing that would be for us all."

"Yes, I know; but I would n't ask for it by word or action."

"Would n't you? I would. If I knew just the look, word, or act that would please Cousin Jotham, I would look or speak or do it the instant he comes in. I would out-Wilkins Cousin Jeremiah. Oh, I have n't seen that. Why, the wretch!"

This exclamation from Mrs. Fuller was caused by the discovery of a picture in the album whose leaves they had been turning, of a man in uniform.

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His pure profile and noble head were brought out by the photographer's art in flattering perfection. Olive gazed at it in silent admiration. Ida's frown vanished in a smile. "If Cousin Jotham should, out of pure contrariness, neglect Max in his will," she continued, "he has a career before him as leading man in a theatrical company. He could live on the returns from his photographs."

"But he would not think of it," replied Olive, apparently treating the subject seriously. "He is remarkably unconscious of his looks, I think."

"He is unconscious. It is his redeeming feature. I think it makes every one forgive him his beauty; but we had better turn the leaf, he is coming."

The men entered the room in rather solemn procession, and Olive looked up with involuntary eagerness. Mr. Van Kirk glanced toward the corner where she and his cousin were seated, but moved on to the side of a shy and stiff young woman to whom his mother was talking, not apparently to the stranger's entertainment.

The young people on the sofa continued to turn the leaves of the album which contained, besides Max's, only pictures of long by-gone days, and they enjoyed much repressed hilarity over the costumes and hair-dressing of Mr. Bagg's circle of acquaintance. They tried in vain to imagine Cousin Jotham in the position of asking for the photograph of a friend and, coming to the counterfeit presentment of a stout lady, in a high, white cap, with im-

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mense puffs of black hair each side her face, Ida dramatized the probable exchange of amenities which led up to the presentation until Olive forgot all pugnacity in merriment, and besought her breathlessly and with tears to desist.

"Mother is looking at us and wondering what is the matter," she exclaimed, struggling with her risibles. "Do hush, Ida. Here comes Cousin Elinor, too."

As she spoke, Olive closed the album guiltily. "You children seem to be having a merry time," said Mrs. Van Kirk suavely, as she approached. "We want you to entertain the rest of us now. Can't we have some music?"

"Music — here?" ejaculated Olive.

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Van Kirk, with some severity. "The piano is in tune. I saw to that myself. Ida, you must sing," she continued, curtly. "Olive, I know, will play your accompaniment."

The graceful woman looked up with a little smile. "Why so imperative?" she asked.

"Oh, for mercy's sake don't try me. This evening would rack the stoutest nerves. Let us get it over."

"Complimentary, is n't she?" — this to Max, who here approached. "You know best if it will be safe for me to sing. Will you promise to restrain our host if he should become violent?"

She rose with Olive, who immediately went to the piano and seated herself. Mrs. Fuller opened a book of music on the rack.

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"I would prefer to sing this," she said, indicating one of the songs.

"Well, I have seen it before, fortunately for you," remarked Olive; "it is not easy to play."

"Singers are so selfish, too, don't you know," returned Mrs. Fuller; "they think so little of the trouble they give their accompanists. Accompanying is the most ungrateful business in the world; but I am an exception, really. I appreciate the work."

"Accompanists are born, not made," replied Olive, smiling, "and I am vain enough to think myself one. I hope you will like me."

"Oh, of course," murmured Ida, and then the prelude tripped daintily forth from the yellow old keys.

Jotham Bagg turned his body toward the performers. His lifeless face gained no expression as his eyes found the singer. The tendrils of her feathery hair against the white nape of her neck affected him with no admiration. His expression was at ludicrous odds with the fire and fervor of the Spanish song that rolled from the singer's lips. It was all about roses, and dark eyes, and fountains, and dancing, and loving.

"Of dancing I knew naught,
By Inez I was taught!"

sang Ida, with spirit, and her host's face wrinkled unconsciously into myriad lines of endurance.

At last came the final refrain: —

"Of *loving* I knew naught,
By Inez I was taught!"

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Old Jotham looked grim disdain over his white neckcloth; his mouth had become but one more wrinkle in his drawn face; but young Van Kirk met the singer when she rose, with ardent dark eyes and unsmiling lips that murmured some inaudible flattery which colored the cheeks of the fair songstress and made her careless of other praise. She had never been so sure as to-night that it was worth while to please Max Van Kirk, and she was elated by her success.

"Max is in love with her," thought Olive, with a start. The possibility had not occurred to her before, and the conviction gave her for the moment, after having so much enjoyed his approving glances and words, a sudden sensation of being left out and neglected.

"Now don't rise, Olive," begged Mrs. Van Kirk. "Give us one of your own songs. No excuses, my dear. In practice or out of practice, you have sung since you were two years old, and can no more help it than the brooks or the birds. Sit right down and sing us something."

The host, hearing this and seeing the girl seat herself once more at the piano, indulged in an unmistakably fresh frown, and wondered why he had not made kindling wood of that nuisance of an instrument before to-day; but as Olive touched her prelude he frowned more deeply. He recognized something in the simple harmony.

Mrs. Carlyle looked up, wondering what had tempted the child to resurrect the old song which

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she had never sung except at her mother's special request. Perhaps it was a spirit of perversity which determined Olive to give a performance as removed as possible from that which had lighted such admiration in Maxwell Van Kirk's eyes. At all events, it was "Mary of Argyle" which she began to sing in an easy, natural voice, as fresh and sweet as herself.

"I have heard the mavis singing
His love-song to the morn"—

Jotham Bagg's frown faded away. He glanced at Van Kirk, who was listening with polite indifference. A strange pang shot through the old man. He had heard Max's grandmother sing that song, — yes, on many a happy evening. Ah, had fate been more kind, this young man would have been his own by right of blood instead of by might of riches.

When the song closed and Olive arose, the company were electrified by what occurred. It was merely courteous of old Jotham, but only those who knew him best could comprehend how amazing his action was.

He walked across the room to Olive and made her a stiff, queer bow. "Thank you," he said, curtly. "I enjoyed that very much."

Max raised his eyebrows. His mother stared uneasily. Mrs. Fuller smiled and looked alert and interested.

Miss Carlyle blushed all over with surprise and girlish exultation.

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"I am comforted at last about the portrait," she said to her mother, as soon as they were alone.

"It was quite a little triumph, Olive, quite a little triumph," responded Mrs. Carlyle. "You really gave pleasure to the poor old gentleman. The text has been ringing in my ears all the evening: 'Consider the poor.' How truly poor Cousin Jotham seems to be. We ought to give him what we can."

Maxwell Van Kirk gave no thought to a possible rival in Olive. He was aglow with the fascination he felt for the charming woman whom he put into the coupé with his mother before starting on his brisk homeward walk.

"Of loving I knew naught,
By Inez I was taught;" —

he hummed as he strode on. "I 'll wait no longer," he murmured, unconsciously smiling. "I 'll speak to her to-morrow, and then I 'll break it to Uncle Jotham."

But Olive Carlyle was not destined to bring more moments of pleasure to the indrawn, narrow life of the millionaire, and twelve hours later Uncle Jotham could neither sanction nor resent Max's attachment. Before noon of the next day it was known throughout business circles that Jotham Bagg had been found dead in his bed that morning.

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CHAPTER III.

LYDIA BAGG.

THERE was one relative of Jotham's who was not invited to the family dinner. A sufficient reason for the neglect lay in the fact that she lived in Massachusetts, but another element in the case was that Mr. Bagg had forgotten the existence of this niece.

Miss Lydia Bagg, having but a misty consciousness that there was such a being as her uncle, was, of course, unmoved by the slight. She was a contented, cheerful woman, living her quiet life in the small village of Ashley, with no one to look out for but Judge Gray and her Irish Nora, who with herself composed a household enviably independent of the longings and heart-burnings experienced by Uncle Jotham's satellites.

One dull, cold morning, some time after her uncle's last dinner-party, Miss Bagg gave the Judge his breakfast as usual, and then left him alone in her shabby parlor to digest it, while she went out to do a few errands.

It always had a soporific effect upon the Judge to be alone. At the time when his eloquence would have annoyed no one, his perverse spirit urged him

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to take little naps or to go into protracted brown studies, during which his mien was portentously solemn, and he seemed to revolve in his gray head all the events of his experience and the problems of life so far as they affected him. From time to time he broke the silence by uttering guttural comments, and these were often at such startling variance with the dignity of his appearance as to lead a chance listener to doubt the profundity of the meditations occupying the wise-looking cranium.

The pupils of the Judge's eyes had a fashion of dilating and contracting with a celerity which did not inspire confidence in his interlocutors, excepting in the case of the one woman who believed in him, loved him, caressed him, and cared for him faithfully through winter's cold and summer's heat.

To the Judge's credit be it said that he forbore from shaking Miss Bagg's faith. If he was not in truth so deeply attached to her as she believed him to be, he certainly forbore from maltreating her physically, or hurting her feelings by malice or derision as he did those of poor Nora, the maid of all work. Good-natured Nora was inclined to like the Judge. She certainly respected him, and had unlimited faith in his penetration and sagacity; yet he flouted her, jeered at her, and laughed her to scorn in a way which actually at times goaded her to wrathful tears; but with this occasional exception Miss Bagg's was a serene little household, where content if not plenty reigned.

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The mistress of it had at different periods of her fifty years of life sighed gently over the facts of single-blessedness and poverty. She had felt the latter more since the Judge became a member of her family. He was so excessively fond of fruit; and Miss Bagg being excessively fond of the Judge, it hurt her tender heart not to be able at all seasons of the year to supply him with his favorite articles of food. However, single-blessedness and limited means being the general lot of womankind in Ashley, these trials were less hard to bear there than they might have been in different surroundings, and Miss Bagg, being of a cheerful, industrious disposition, did not dream of spending any time in wishing circumstances other than they were.

Dozens of little wrinkles had already woven themselves about her eyes, but she never bestowed a thought upon them. Dozens of gray hairs mingled in the tightly tied tuft of curls that stood out in a bunch at the back of her head, but she did not attempt to count them, and never had pulled one out. Miss Lydia had been prim and precise at eighteen, when she was the youngest of the Bagg girls, and now that she was alone in the world she was one of the Bagg girls still among the more ancient sisterhood of Ashley; and in the consistent if selfish attachment of the Judge, and the whole-souled, fervent love of her Irish Nora, there was nothing to remind her that she was growing old.

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She set forth from her house this chilly morning as usual to make her small purchases, and nothing within or without gave her a presentiment that the day, so similar to hundreds that had preceded it, was to bring her to a sharp turning in her life's lane.

Nora watched her from the window, filled with affectionate approval of her gait and the fall of the old plaid shawl from her thin shoulders. Miss Bagg did not grow fleshy with her years, and plump Nora was never weary of admiring the bones that showed so genteelly in her mistress's hands, and she considered Miss Lydia's profile — a very pronounced profile, thanks to a slightly retreating forehead and chin and a prominent, thin nose — to be the ideal of all that was aristocratic and fine.

"She had a right to take her umbrell," muttered the girl, with a careful thought for the ancient black straw hat which had accompanied Miss Lydia to market during all the years her maid had known her, and perhaps longer still.

The Judge from his window could also see Miss Bagg's retreating figure. He yawned as he looked after her, and then began to wink and blink and nod in one of his comfortable siestas. It was a dull, dark morning. A fire sputtered feebly in the open stove, a tall clock ticked in a corner of the room. The furniture was spare and faded, and the carpet a much mended affair, with an indistinguishable pattern. A little stand of house-plants in the window was the only cheerful object in the

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room, until, after many swings of the clock's long pendulum, Nora came in to look after the condition of the fire. The Judge opened his eyes with a start.

"Hello," he remarked, in his deep bass.

"Hello, Joodge," returned the girl.

"Come, kiss me," said the Judge coaxingly.

"'Dade, thin, I won't. It 's a bit o' me lip ye 'd be afther takin'. Go off wid ye."

The Judge laughed as though he rather enjoyed the impeachment, while Nora knelt down before the grate. "Tor'rmint! The fire 's gone out an me agin," she exclaimed, placing some sticks beneath the coals in forlorn hope.

"Ha, ha," laughed the Judge. "Get out, red-head!"

Nora's face flamed between her annoyance with the perverse fire and this assault.

"It 's as good have a rid hid as a rid tail like yerself," she retorted. "Shut up, now."

The poker fell upon the hearth with a crash.

"Come in," called the Judge, with sudden solemnity.

As though in response to his summons, the door opened and a lady entered. It was Miss Bagg herself, — the being who loved him; the woman whose pleasure and self-imposed duty it was to minister to his happiness; yet I regret to say that the only greeting which escaped him now on beholding her was a subdued ejaculation of "Rats!"

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The new-comer did not heed him. Her quick eyes fell upon her maid. "Fire out again, Nora? Strange you can't learn to make that fire. Here, it is of no use to do that. Lift off the coal first. Now, put on your paper and sticks. Now, go get the blower. How damp it is! The cold creeps into the house and into one's very bones. Does n't it, Judgie-boy?"

The brisk little woman took off her shawl and hat, and after giving one or two pats to her hair, seated herself to open the letters she had brought home from the post-office. There were two of them, and letters were a great novelty to Lydia Bagg; so she allowed Nora to pursue her own way, muttering, about the fire, while she opened one of the envelopes with considerable eagerness. Miss Bagg's face, as she read, grew more and more mystified. She turned the letter over at last and looked at its blank back, as though hoping to find there some key by which to decipher its contents. She gave her chair a hitch toward the window, with the involuntary effort, so natural, to get light on a perplexing subject, but when she had read the letter the second time its contents still remained dark sayings to her. The mysterious document was dated from New York and ran thus: —

•

MISS LYDIA BAGG:

Dear Madam, — My friend Mr. Galbraith has told me of the change in your circumstances, and it occurs to me that I, although a stranger to you,

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should extend to you my congratulations and in addition offer you my services in case I can be of assistance to you. Mr. Galbraith thinks you may wish to remove to this city, and that perhaps you are unfamiliar here. I will simply say that in case there is no one whom you would prefer to call upon for the information, or assistance, or woman's wit you may require in seeking new surroundings, I, being connected with you by ties of marriage if not of blood, shall be pleased to serve you in any possible way. A letter to your lawyer's address will find me. Hoping we may become friends, I am sincerely yours, IDA E. FULLER.

Miss Bagg lifted her wondering eyes, and a roaring in the grate attracted her attention. She started up and took off the blower, then opened the door and called Nora.

"Does it want more coal, mem?" inquired the latter, hurrying in from the kitchen.

"Nora," said her mistress, with unwonted severity, "I 've taught you to read and you 're a credit to me. What does that say?" — presenting the envelope which had brought the mystery.

"Miss — Lydia — Bagg, mem," replied the girl, faltering and round-eyed.

"Very well. Is there any other person of that name in Ashley?"

"Not as I ever heerd of, mem."

"Of course there is n't. Now, the question is, what does it all mean? Wait — the other letter."

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Miss Bagg's manner was almost tragic, and Nora stared, amazed, while her mistress tore open the second envelope and perused its contents.

"You rascal!" exclaimed the Judge severely. Then, changing suddenly to Miss Bagg's soprano voice, he added wheedlingly: "Now, Judgie-boy, can't you sing a little?"

"Why Nora!" exclaimed Miss Bagg, growing very red. Then she turned so pale that her handmaid began to fan her violently with her apron.

"Oh don't, Miss Bagg; please don't! What is it? What is it? Yer scarin' the life out o' me!"

"Never mind. Hush, — it is all right. It 's sudden, that is all;" and Miss Lydia, languidly waving her hand, sank back in her chair, and continued to look so white that Nora fell on her knees beside her and wept, and exclaimed, and fanned, while the Judge, disliking the whirlwind raised in his vicinity, cackled and laughed and made threatening lunges toward her head, while she, for once unconscious of his hostility, fanned on.

"Nora, I believe you 're fond of me," said Miss Bagg, rather tremulously.

"I love every inch o' you, mem," returned the girl fervently.

"I never gave you much wages," sighed Miss Lydia, "but you know I could n't."

"Wages, is it!" cried Nora, her eyes full of tears. "Did n't ye take me whin me mother died an' me father kicked me into the street, an' I was that little an' stupid I was no good to annybody;

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an' did n't ye dress me, and tache me, an' be patient wid me even whin I let the fire out an ye; an' don't I love ye? boo-hoo, boo-hoo," blubbered the girl.

Miss Bagg patted the red hair. "I am glad you do care for me, Nora," she answered, "for I never felt so lonely in my life;" and then Miss Lydia shed some quiet tears on her own account, while the Judge whistled a few bars of "The Girl I Left Behind Me," dancing clumsily with much spirit to his own piping.

"An' I won't lave you, no matter what 's happened. 'T ain't wages would get me away, you know that, mem."

Miss Bagg wiped her eyes. "I believe you, Nora. It is too bad to frighten you so. Nothing bad has happened. I suppose it is something very good. I 've had a lot of money left to me."

"Ye have!" exclaimed the other, in sudden glee, clapping her hands on her knees and gazing up through tear-wet eyes. "Then we 'll be afther havin' a new tay-kittle, won't we, Miss Bagg? Hooroo!"

Miss Lydia nodded, and swallowed hard. She could not pass from tears to smiles so readily.

"Scratch," said the Judge, in a bass voice of entreaty. His mistress looked at him. His head was lowered close to the wires of his cage, and he was gazing at her out of the tops of his golden eyes, each delicately shaded feather on his scalp erected. Miss Lydia mechanically slipped her hand through the bars and smoothed his head,

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while he turned his powerful beak and took hold of her fingers, nibbling them gently as they ruffled his plumage. All the mines of Golconda would not have tempted Nora so to put herself in the Judge's power, although he frequently gave her the same invitation.

"Miss Bagg, if ye 're sure 't ain't a joke they 're playin' on ye," she said earnestly, "could I go an' git the kittle now? Sure I 'm scalded to the elbow wid the cover fallin' in the old one."

"Yes, yes, Nora. Go on, poor child."

Left alone, Miss Bagg tried to adjust herself to the amazing news which had so unnerved her. Once more she read the lawyer's letter, informing her briefly of her good fortune. What would the neighbors say, who had been familiar with her poverty for a quarter of a century? Little by little, very slowly, possibilities presented themselves to her practical, unimaginative mind. She could paint her house. She could have a new carpet in the sitting-room to replace this faded and threadbare affair upon which her feet now rested. She could afford to give something more to her church than the work of her industrious hands.

It was all very wonderful and very pleasant. A glow of vague anticipation warmed her heart, and the temporary dismay which the overpowering news brought with it had passed away.

"Judgie, is n't it wonderful!" she murmured, and the Judge clucked his satisfaction at having his feathers smoothed the wrong way, and gave her one of his knowing side glances.

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"I 've nobody but a bird and a grateful Irish girl to be glad for me, but I 'm a happy woman, and I 'll try to do good with the money — when I get a little used to it," added Miss Bagg, a timid catch in her breath as a dim but awful sense of responsibility assailed her.

It was late that night before she could succeed in losing consciousness in a restless slumber. Mr. Galbraith, the lawyer who had written to her, had said that she would be obliged to come soon to New York to take part in business settlements, and the letter from his friend, the strange lady, seemed, in the excited condition of Miss Bagg's mind, almost threatening. She wondered if she must really give up the little home she loved and had grown into, until not the snail's shell seemed more a part of itself than her story and a half house did of Miss Bagg. Surely they would not be so cruel as to tear her away from it. She could go to the city and write her name wherever the lawyer told her to, and then come back and continue the peaceful life habitual to her, with increased powers for usefulness, the thought of which brought a very happy feeling with it each time it recurred.

Mr. Jotham Bagg. Miss Lydia pondered upon the little she knew of her benefactor, and tried to remember his looks. Notwithstanding the fact that he was her father's only brother, she could remember to have seen him only once, and then at a time when she was so young that all she could recall of him now was a portentous frown. There

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had been some trouble between him and her father, — that she knew. Never in the many years during which she had been an orphan had this stranger-relative made a sign that he knew of her existence. Now he had left her a fortune. It was strange, incredible; yet it was true, and when Miss Bagg fell asleep she was still marveling, still building the simplest of castles in the air, which, although various, shared some features in common. They were all well painted in pale yellow with chocolate trimmings, and had the brightest of carpets.

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CHAPTER IV.

MISS BAGG'S FIRST PROPOSAL.

MISS LYDIA awoke to a strange combination of mental impressions the following morning. Although she shrunk from the meeting with lawyers and possible other strangers which must take place before she could come into quiet possession of her own, the new idea of power which had dawned in her mind deepened and spread, and gradually swallowed up her vague terrors.

"The new kittle biles iligant, mem," was Nora's greeting when her mistress came downstairs.

"I am glad," replied Miss Bagg, reflecting the girl's jubilant smile. Evidently for Nora there was nothing further that the money could do. "It does n't seem real to me, Nora. The whole thing is like a dream," continued Miss Lydia. "I have the lawyer's letter in my pocket, and have to read it occasionally to prove the reality of what has happened."

Something in her mistress' face roused the maid's imagination.

"And is it rich ye air?" she asked eagerly, beginning to understand that this good news might be more important than she had realized.

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"Why — why — it looks so," replied Miss Lydia, sitting down to breakfast.

"An' will ye wear di'monds an' pur'rls?" asked Nora, her eyes very round.

"Oh, no indeed, you foolish girl."

"Ye 'd become 'em. That ye would, Miss Bagg. I 'd like to see 'em a-sthringin' around yer neck and through yer eur'rls, an' you in a pink satin gown a-swapin' afther ye," cried Nora, with honest fervor.

Miss Lydia raised her brown calico sleeve and shook a thin forefinger at her admirer. "Go along, silly child, and bring me my coffee," she said; then she turned to a neighboring chair, where, as usual, the Judge's cage was set, for he and Miss Lydia always took their coffee together. "You can have oranges now, Judgie-boy, and bananas, every day and every hour, if you want them," she added caressingly.

The Judge responded by barking like a wrathful little terrier.

"Tut, tut, that is n't pretty," said Miss Bagg, in her usual formula of reproach.

"He do be awful aggrava'atin' this mornin'," remarked Nora, entering with the coffee-pot. "He 's called me rid-hid over a dozen times while I 've been gettin' the breakfast."

"You must n't be sensitive about that, Nora," replied Miss Bagg. "You know I have told you that the sailor who gave him to my dear father had bright red hair, much redder than yours, and I suppose the man's mates must have addressed him

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in the terms that the poor bird copied, for the Judge said those phrases when he first came to us. In fact, there were other vulgar and impolite ejaculations connected with his master which he seems to have forgotten now. 'Hi, there, Carrots!' I remember, was one of them."

"For the love o' mercy, don't put him in moind of it, mem, for he do be that shairp he 'll hev it at me the very next time he sees the chance to shame me before annybody."

"Be thankful he does n't swear, Nora," said Miss Bagg solemnly. "That sailor man must have had unusual principle. He told my father that as soon as he got the Judge he put a placard on his cage, and printed on it, 'Please do not swear at the bird.' He said he even had to fight the other sailors several times on account of his determination."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the Judge, with sudden noisiness, as though the memory of it all was too much for him. "Ho! ho! bless me! Oh *dear;*" and he drifted off into a chuckle over his coffee-cup, and looked up at Nora with such a wicked leer that instinctively she crossed herself. It was her unuttered opinion that the Judge knew all the oaths ever invented, and that it was only a part of his cleverness to repress them in Miss Bagg's house.

"I have to write to this lawyer," thought Miss Lydia, pushing her chair back from the table and sighing. She found herself too excited to eat.

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"I suppose I must tell him I will come to New York at once. Who can I ask to go with me? I don't want to be beholden to that Fuller lady. No doubt she meant to be very kind, but I think I 'll just take Nora. No need yet to tell people what has happened. Nora," she added aloud, "don't say a word to any one about the news I have had. How should you like to go to New York with me for a day or two?"

The girl's eyes sparkled. "And the Joodge?" she asked.

"No. I think I could trust Mrs. Furlong to take good care of the Judge."

"Just you an' me?" cried Nora, clapping her hands. "Oh, Miss Bagg, I niver thought to see New Yor'rk."

"Well, perhaps I will take you. Clear off the table. I'm going into the other room to write a letter." And Miss Bagg departed, carrying the parrot's cage, while her maid went singing about her work in excited delight.

Miss Lydia took out her little old writing-desk and sat down to her task. It was another dull day, and her shabby sitting-room looked unusually poverty-stricken to her because she now knew neat, new furnishings to be attainable. The thought nerved her hand to the execution of its work, but she had not proceeded beyond "Mr. Galbraith, Respected Sir," when she became conscious that one or more persons were entering her gate. She stretched her neck to get a better view through the

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window, and was surprised to observe two strange men walking along her garden path between the leafless rosebushes toward the house.

One of the strangers, a short, stout individual, with a red face, was talking and gesticulating in an apparently angry fashion to the other, who was tall and kept his eyes bent on the ground. In a minute the shrill door-bell pealed through the house.

Miss Bagg felt mystified and even a little intimidated. She called to Nora as she heard her come through the corridor, but Nora was singing and did not heed her, and Miss Lydia listened intently. All that came to her through the closed door of the room where she sat was a confusion of voices and a bustle of feet; then suddenly the stout and choleric little man whom she had observed in the yard burst open the door with great force, and, entering, closed it and planted himself against it with such suddenness that Miss Bagg uttered a faint shriek, and, flinging her desk into a neighboring chair, started tremulously to her feet.

"I will be first!" exclaimed the little man. "It is my right and I claim it. I will be first!" and he struck a back-handed blow at the door he was guarding, with such vigor that the Judge responded cordially: —

"Come in."

"Who are you, sir! What does this mean?" demanded Miss Lydia, in a voice which trembled too much for severity. Wild visions of seizure, arrest, and disgrace careered through her brain.

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"I am J. Wilkins. Jeremiah Wilkins. That 's who I am, and I suppose you are Miss Lydia Bagg; the niece of that treacherous, slippery old reprobate, Jotham Bagg, Esquire."

The little man stopped, to wipe his heated brow.

"Well, sir," returned Miss Lydia, lifting her head with what dignity she could muster, "why should you come here to insult him?"

"Because I 'm a wronged, defrauded man, and I won't stand it. Do you understand me? I have been wronged, injured, beyond all precedent."

"Well, sir, what is it to me if you have?"

"Because you have done it, madam. You are the guilty party. You!" Wilkins pointed a stubby forefinger at Miss Bagg, who retreated a step, her tuft of curls all a-quiver with astonishment and trepidation.

"Sir!" was all she could manage to reply to the startling accusation.

"Look at me, madam. You see before you a gentleman; well dressed, accustomed to good living and to all the comforts and many of the luxuries of life. A large part of these luxuries have been provided me on trust. All the tradespeople who know us were as sure as I was that my cousin and intimate friend Jotham intended to leave the major part if not the entire amount of his fortune to me. He did intend it. I am as sure of it as ever."

"Why," asked Miss Bagg, gathering her courage with a tremendous effort, "should you still believe

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it when my Uncle Jotham did leave his fortune to *me?*"

"Pooh, madam." Mr. Wilkins snapped contemptuous fingers before his empurpled visage. "He never left a cent of it to you. Did n't you know that?"

"Then what — why" — chirped Miss Lydia, feeling bewildered and browbeaten.

"It *fell* to you," explained the other wrathfully. "The forgetful old reprobate had destroyed an old will, and before he had made a new one in my favor — he was always putting off and procrastinating — he died. He meant to make it, I know it. The widow Van Kirk was sure Max was to be the heir. The Carlyles and the Fletchers and the rest expected to be remembered, and out of spite Tom Fletcher put the lawyers on your track. I know very well he did. The Fuller woman thought she should get her baby hands on some of the greenbacks, but I knew better. Cousin Jotham may have meant something for Max, though I doubt it; but I know he never considered the rest of them. It was I, Jerry Wilkins, his companion in thousands of games of chess; his confidant, his comrade, who he intended should have the handling of his money when he was through with it; and now look at the situation. Here I am loaded with debts, and here you are — a woman whom I believe Jotham Bagg scarcely knew existed, reaping where I have sown, rolling in money which a week ago I dare say you never dreamed of own-

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ing. You owe me reparation, madam, reparation! What do you say to marrying me? I'm a presentable man. I have a good social position, and I will give you the benefit of it. Together we could make a sensation even in a city of millionaires." Mr. Wilkins left the door and advanced to glower more nearly at Miss Bagg, who stood mutely trembling and gazing at him. "Now, what do you say?' As he made this addition the suitor paused beside the table and brought his fist down upon it so close to the cage that the Judge was much jarred, and shouting "Come in," promptly fell off the perch, which he remounted, hand over hand, a certain sleekness of feathers and contraction of the eye boding no good to the stranger who had so disturbed his equilibrium.

Wilkins continued to glare at Miss Lydia.

"Now, will you do it?" he continued, after the impressive pause.

"Certainly not," quavered Miss Bagg breathlessly.

"Be careful. Think what you're doing. Take time."

"Oh, look out for the Judge," said Miss Lydia tremulously.

"Aha, the Judge, is it? There's somebody ahead of me. I'll settle him," sputtered Mr. Wilkins wrathfully.

"Oh, be careful; he bites sometimes!" exclaimed Miss Lydia.

"Bites, does he?" repeated the other, some-

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what surprised at so novel a mode of obtaining satisfaction. "Well, then, so can I. Let him come on. If— Ow! wow!" Mr. Wilkins uttered a long roar of surprise and pain, for the Judge, excited and angry, watching his opportunity, had launched forth his head, snakelike now in its slimness, and administered a sharp cut on the stubby forefinger before mentioned. Miss Bagg uttered a shriek as the blood spurted forth, and at the same moment Nora's voice was heard protesting shrilly.

"Lave me in to her, I say. I'll not stay out no longer. It's tommyhawkin' her he is;" and again the parlor door burst open, and Nora appeared, wildly disheveled, followed by the tall young man who had accompanied Mr. Wilkins up the garden path.

"Well, have you had your say out, Wilkins? I've kept a clear field for you as long as I could. Hello, what's the matter?"

"Come here, sir, if you are a friend of this person," exclaimed Miss Bagg, her thin cheeks coloring, and her mild eyes sparkling. She had wrapped her handkerchief around the maltreated finger, and Mr. Wilkins, his visage considerably paled, was holding it stiffly upright before him. "Come and tie up this finger. Nora, go get a clean rag and some thread." Miss Bagg retreated hastily, and the tall stranger approached.

"Mr. Wilkins will be better now he has been bled a little," he remarked coolly. "My name is

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Van Kirk, Miss Bagg. I should not have come but that I expected to present myself alone."

"Ah, I dare say," observed Mr. Wilkins, reviving, "each of us expected to present himself alone."

"Hold up now," said the younger man, taking the roll of cloth Nora offered and proceeding with his bandaging. "You 've had your say."

"I would have had it, if it had n't been for that devil of a parrot."

"Ah, Joodge, ye 're the knowin' bye," chuckled Nora, in a whisper. "Ye 'll have me fist full o' paynuts this night o' the wor'rld."

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CHAPTER V.

MISS BAGG'S SECOND PROPOSAL.

"Now, Miss Bagg," said Mr. Wilkins, shaking his dressed forefinger at her (it shook quite as impressively bandaged as bare), "tell me, if you please, who this Judge is to whom you referred."

"I should think you had discovered," returned Miss Lydia, with recovered spirit. "If you are still curious, offer him another of your fingers."

Mr. Van Kirk smiled as he leaned familiarly on the back of the old haircloth rocking-chair.

"The ——! That bird?" ejaculated Mr. Wilkins.

Miss Lydia nodded.

"Then, Miss Bagg — Pooh! nonsense! Let me apologize for anything in my conduct which may have seemed hasty, and let me hope that you will receive my proposition in the spirit in which it was made." Mr. Wilkins, too entirely possessed by his one idea to be deterred by Van Kirk's presence, approached Lydia once more, much more of authority than of supplication in his manner.

She thrust her hands out in a repellent gesture.

"Nora, leave us," she exclaimed, scandalized at the thought of her maid's overhearing the stranger's

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addresses. The girl obeyed reluctantly. "Don't come near me," she said then to Wilkins, excitedly. "Horrible man, you swore when the bird bit you. I do not care about your debts, and I abhor you. Oh!" — turning to Max desperately, — "whoever you are, whatever you are, can you be this person's friend! Won't you protect me?"

Max grinned at the disconcerted Wilkins. "Of course I will," he answered. "Here, Miss Bagg, you look tired. Sit down in this rocking-chair. Good-morning, Wilkins," — with a debonair nod. "It is my turn now."

"Don't listen to him," exclaimed the baffled suitor, shaking his fist at his laughing friend. "Don't let him come around you. Jotham Bagg showed what he thought of him. He showed his opinion plainly enough by cutting the fine young man off without a shilling. His handsome mother, too. No doubt she thought" —

"Hold your tongue," thundered Max. He had worn his amused smile all through the first of the enraged Wilkins's speech, but now his face was as serious and far more wrathful than Miss Bagg's own. "You are beside yourself," he continued quietly. "You have exhausted Miss Bagg's patience and had better be off; but if you mention my mother again, I shall save you the trouble of going out by the door."

Van Kirk came from behind the rocking-chair, and looked so powerful and angry as he towered above his choleric friend that Lydia emitted a frightened little squeak.

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Wilkins gave one red glance at the ex-lieutenant. "I will go, madam," he said, turning to his hostess, "provided you will give me an interview when you come up to town."

"She won't promise you anything. Be decent and go," said Max, taking a step nearer, "or else" —

Miss Bagg started up, and clasped one of his big arms between both her thin, little hands. "Oh, don't touch him," she cried, "he is just going."

"Ah, I see," said Wilkins sardonically. "You have your own little game to play. Well, I wish you joy;" and he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Miss Lydia sank into the nearest chair, and began to sob into her handkerchief. Max strode to the window, and looked gloomily out at the bare bushes and moist dead leaves. The varying states of mind through which this young gentleman had passed since the evening of the late Mr. Bagg's dinner-party can perhaps be accurately imagined by the sympathetic reader.

His grief at his old friend's sudden end had been sincere. Such graciousness as was in Jotham Bagg to show had always been displayed toward him as boy and then as man. The rich speculator had taken trouble for him, had shown constant care of him, had apparently made him one of the few deep and abiding interests of his life. Max Van Kirk had every reason to believe in the old man's regard, even affection, for him. He had believed

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in it, and still believed in it down to the present day. When it became certainly known that Mr. Bagg had died intestate, the shock had been great to the young man and had nearly bereft his mother of reason. She fought to the last possible minute against the facts, adding by her rage and resentment to the burden her son had to bear.

He had laid down his commission. The action was irrevocable. A deep sting in the circumstances lay in the fact that his reason for taking the step was generally known among his acquaintances. Had the property come to him, as everybody but the fatuous Wilkins believed it would do from the moment Mr. Bagg requested the young officer to leave the army, general approval and admiration would have followed him. As it was, it drove the hot blood to Van Kirk's face to realize the remarks that would be made regarding him and his position, until his acquaintances found some newer topic of interest. The situation held plenty of practical difficulties, keen disappointment, and the necessity for readjusting all his thoughts and expectations, but the mortifying phase of the affair was hardest for the proud young fellow to bear.

Distracted between the chaos of his own tormenting thoughts and his mother's frenzy, the position was one to show what metal he was made of, and that the self-control he exhibited was something astonishing even to Mr. Bagg's lawyer was evident to Ida Fuller, who happened to hear the

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respectful expression of sympathy which Mr. Galbraith made to the young man when the last hope of discovering a will had been given up.

Mrs. Van Kirk's wits had all been driven woolgathering by the catastrophe. No help was to be expected from her, and it was Mrs. Fuller who by some adroit suggestions to the lawyer set wheels in motion which led to Maxwell's appearance in Ashley on his present errand.

As he waited now by the window, he was as uncomfortable as a man need be. He turned and regarded the brown calico figure, quite pathetic, topped by its bowed head and the quivering, faded bunch of curls. Had he felt impatience or even hatred of this insignificant woman who had usurped his place, it would not have been astonishing. Every detail of the room bore evidence to her poverty. Ten thousand dollars would have made her rich. This half-alive little town limited her horizon. It was hard that such an one should have the administering of such wealth.

But Max did not hate her. He felt a very real compassion for the slender, shaken little figure, mixed with hot impatience at the remembrance of Wilkins.

He was suddenly surprised by the Judge's deep bass.

"*You — you — rascal!*" exclaimed the parrot, with great emphasis and a lisp on the *s* which made the visitor smile.

"You have a wise bird," said Van Kirk, coming

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forward. "The way matters have gone, I do feel like a rascal to have come here and added to your annoyance this morning. I certainly had no idea Mr. Wilkins was coming, or I should have staid away."

Miss Bagg put up a deprecating hand, and slowly emerged from her handkerchief. "Don't say that," she returned chokingly. "What should I have done without you? I do thank you. Indeed, I do. Excuse me for crying, but I have been so upset — and shocked — and frightened!" and to Max's great discomfort she relapsed into the handkerchief.

"I ask your pardon for letting him in to disturb you so, for I suspected that he had been drinking, but the fact is, he was so outraged to discover me on the train on the same errand as himself, and clamored so loudly in defense of his right to see you first, that I was anxious to show him that I had no desire to interfere with him. The consequence was that I sat in your hall during Mr. Wilkins's visit, and had great difficulty in persuading your servant to remain there with me until he could have his say out."

"Then you knew what he was going to say!" exclaimed Miss Bagg reproachfully.

"Not at all. I saw he was angry and disappointed about the will, and I dare say he threatened to sue you."

"Threatened to! He did sue me, if one could call that suing. The rough, wicked creature!"

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"What?"

"He wanted me to marry him," said Miss Lydia, so excited at the memory that she forgot she was talking openly to a man. "Oh, if money brings trouble like this, I don't wonder the love of it is called the root of all evil!"

Van Kirk smiled broadly, Miss Lydia's face being again buried, at the picture her words evoked. He sat down near her. "Don't mind it," he said soothingly. "Wilkins's disappointment was too much for him and he is a little crazy for the time being."

Miss Lydia shook her curls and shuddered. "Well — well — excuse me, Mr. — "

"Van Kirk."

"Mr. Van Kirk, I have not asked you what you wish with me." She sat up with an effort at her customary self-possession, and put her handkerchief in her pocket. Meeting her visitor's eyes, she realized for the first time that she was talking to an extraordinarily handsome man. She forgot her gray hair, poor little Lydia, and the wish that she had on her best dress sprung as naturally in her bosom as though she had been eighteen.

"My errand is nothing that will not keep," began Max, "if you are too tired and would prefer to see me at another time."

Miss Bagg looked at him with a sudden idea. "You are one of Uncle Jotham's relatives. That — creature said" —

"Yes," the young man nodded.

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"And you are not angry with me?" Miss Lydia asked it so innocently and wistfully that Max quite liked her from that moment.

"Not so angry as to demand that you marry me," he returned, his brown eyes laughing into hers, while Miss Bagg smiled faintly and blushed painfully.

"It hurts my feelings and disappoints me to find that Uncle Jotham did not think of me, nor wish to make me his heir," she said sadly.

"Oh, no matter about that," replied Van Kirk, "since such good luck has come to you. You know Uncle Jotham was not noted for his affectionate disposition."

"Did you call him Uncle Jotham, too?" asked Miss Lydia curiously.

"Yes, although the relationship was in fact not a near one. He has taken an interest in me ever since I was a little chap, and has done a great deal for me. I believe my grandmother was answerable for the fact that he never married."

"I want to know," returned Miss Lydia. "Your grandmother," she repeated, suddenly feeling that Max did not belong even to her generation, and that the brown calico would do quite as well as anything else.

"Yes, I suppose his attachment for her accounts for his kindness to me."

"Do you call it kindness to do as that — person said he did — cut you off without a shilling?"

"Oh, that was a — that is all right," replied

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Max shortly. His endurance would not carry him to the pitch of telling his story to this stranger.

"You knew Uncle Jotham, then?" said Miss Bagg. "I am not tired. I can hear your errand now as well as at any time."

Van Kirk nodded. "It will not take long. I am sent by your lawyer as a sort of general utility man. Mr. Galbraith asked me to come here and see you, thus saving his time, and if you desired it to help you close up your affairs here and move to New York."

"Move to New York!" repeated Miss Lydia, aghast. "You don't mean for me to live there for good and all?"

"Tut, tut! That is n't pretty," remarked the Judge in Miss Bagg's gentle, high voice, and then, as his mistress and her visitor both laughed, he laughed too, holding his breath and gasping in a way he had learned from Nora in her hilarious moments.

"Why, yes," returned Max, "we all supposed that a small country place would not give you horizon enough now."

"Oh, dear, I had n't thought I must do that," sighed Lydia, looking off into space.

"Nor must you," said Van Kirk kindly. "You are quite free, — gloriously free."

Miss Bagg looked at him wistfully. "Would you do it, if you were in my place?" she asked.

Involuntarily the young man looked about the shabby little room and out to the village street

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along which no one had passed, to his knowledge, since his arrival.

"Well yes," he replied, smoothing his mustache, "I would. There is a great deal to do and to see in the world, Miss Bagg, and you will have every facility for enjoying all that wealth can purchase. Can you consider shutting your money up in a vault and yourself in a forgotten little place like this?"

His words set Miss Lydia's heart to beating. As her visitor was in person and dress a complete novelty in Ashley, no doubt he was a type of grand and beautiful things which she now possessed the golden key to unlock in the great city. Yet no young robin hesitating and teetering on the edge of its nest was ever more timorous than Miss Lydia now.

She looked into Van Kirk's eyes doubtfully, and clasped her hands with their needle-pricked finger-tips.

"If I should decide to go to New York to live, would you stand by me," she asked in an unsteady voice, "just until I got a little used to it?"

Max manfully repressed a smile. "I would," he replied briefly, and Miss Bagg breathed an unconscious sigh of relief.

"I have a feeling as though I could trust you," she said. "And I would somehow so much rather have your help than this lady's." As she spoke, Miss Bagg, with great simplicity, slipped her hand into her pocket and drew forth the two letters,

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which had never left her since their reception. Choosing the one she wished him to read, she passed it to Max, who opened it and perused its contents.

As he did so a flush mounted slowly to his temples.

"Clever, quick-witted," he muttered, as he reached the signature.

"Do you know that lady?" asked Miss Lydia, as she received her letter again.

"Yes, I do," returned Van Kirk, and Miss Bagg noticed that he looked even handsomer than before.

"Did she expect the money, too?" she asked, anxiously.

Max looked very serious. "No — a — not directly," he answered.

"Well, I would rather have you," continued his hostess, "if you really have some time, and would be kind enough to be bothered with me."

"Why not keep me indefinitely?" asked Van Kirk suggestively.

His companion's heart leaped. She stammered in genuine bewilderment. "Keep — keep" —

"Yes; Mr. Galbraith's main idea in sending me down here was to offer myself to you" —

The maiden heart bounded again.

"As your private secretary. You will need one."

Miss Bagg looked involuntarily at the spindle-legged bookcase against the wall.

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"I — don't quite understand."

"No, you do not quite understand yet what responsibilities are about to come upon you. You will have a great many letters every day, — begging letters, business letters, all sorts of letters, and they will have to be answered. Your accounts will be complicated. You will want somebody to keep them. In short, there are a number of situations in your new life in which you will want a right-hand man."

Miss Bagg looked over at her writing-desk, where she had laboriously begun the letter to her lawyer and advanced no further than "Respected Sir." Manifestly, if she were going to receive a large number of business letters, it would be a heavy burden to her to answer them.

"Of course, if you had a husband," pursued Max, "he would assume these cares for you." His companion hesitated, and he added, smiling: "There you have your choice, you see, — Wilkins or me."

Miss Bagg shuddered, and held out her hand involuntarily.

Max took it. "Then I am engaged to you?"

Miss Lydia blushed, and withdrew her hand. "You do use such odd terms," she complained.

"Well, then, if you prefer it, you have engaged me as your servant, — your private secretary. Is that a fact?"

Miss Bagg looked at her calico gown, her shabby little room, and then at the fine gentleman whose

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inposing presence made all the surroundings look meaner than ever.

"I am like one in a dream," she said, with a pitiful sort of wistfulness. "You my servant! It is the most absurd thing I ever heard of in my life."

"I shall try to be so good a one that you will not think you can dispense with me," replied Van Kirk soberly.

Miss Lydia looked at him with thoughtful admiration. "One thing you will have to do," she said. "You will have to see to paying yourself enough."

Max nodded. "We will get Mr. Galbraith to help us about that," he replied gravely.

At this juncture there came a soft knock on the parlor door.

"Miss Bagg, Miss Bagg," whispered a voice hoarsely.

"Come in, Nora," replied her mistress.

The girl entered, and peered carefully around.

"The rid gintleman, the little turkey-cock man, is he gone, mem?" she asked at last.

"Oh, yes, some time ago."

"And ye 're all right, mem?" continued Nora, looking suspiciously at Max.

"Quite right. We are talking business, Nora."

"All right, mem. I 'm just ferninst in the dinin'-room, if ye should want me;" and with a parting glance at Max, intended to constrain him to continue his good behavior, she left the room.

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"I see you have one servant much attached to you," said Van Kirk. "Will it be necessary for her to follow your fortunes?"

"Yes, indeed. Nora goes wherever I do; and the Judge, of course," turning toward her pet.

"Ah, so that is the Judge, is it?" queried Max, rising and approaching the cage.

"Scratch," said the parrot, lowering his head at the young man invitingly.

"You 'd better not," put in Miss Lydia hastily. "The Judge is treach—changeable sometimes."

"I think not, my gray friend," said Max, shaking his head. "You have sampled Uncle Jotham's possible legatees sufficiently this morning. Thank you, I think I won't."

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CHAPTER VI.

THE EX-LIEUTENANT'S SHOPPING.

VAN KIRK was somewhat staggered when he realized what would be the first proof Miss Bagg would exact of his willingness to "stand by her" in her new life. The labor of conveying troops from one point to another on the frontier sunk into nothingness when compared with the difficulty of escorting to the metropolis Uncle Jotham's heiress, her Irish girl, and her parrot, along with certain not-to-be-relinquished personal effects. Before he parted with his new employer that day, a compromise had been decided upon. Miss Bagg's reluctance to leave her home definitely was met by Max's suggestion that she should go alone with him to New York, see her lawyer, look about her, and decide whether or not she would make the city her future home.

"For that matter, you know, Miss Bagg, you need never give up your cottage," he said. "You can retain it for a country house;" here he smoothed his mustache. "Why, you can run on here every few weeks, if you become homesick, and take a look at things."

Miss Lydia gazed at him with wide eyes. "Run on here from where?"

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"New York. It is nothing to do. You will see that. A pretty ride of six hours in a pleasant parlor."

"But the expense!" exclaimed Miss Bagg, feeling that this was indeed a most giddy and reckless adviser.

Max sighed unconsciously. "That is something," he said slowly and impressively, "which never during your life you need consider again. Do you understand me?"

Lydia caught her breath, and lifted her hand to her forehead as though bewildered. One comforting, comprehensible consideration she could grasp. She looked around the room. "Then I need n't sell the house, even if I do not live here. My grandfather built it. It is not,"— looking at Max with a glimmer of pride, — "it is not a cottage. There is an upstairs to it."

Her secretary caressed that very convenient mustache of his again.

"You need not even rent it. You can hire some one, if you like, to keep it clean and well-aired, ready for you to occupy it a week or a month at any time you feel disposed."

Miss Bagg gazed at the speaker, and smiled slowly in childlike pleasure.

"You make it very easy for me," she said.

"That is what you have engaged me for. I am to stand between you and trouble henceforth, so far as I can."

Miss Bagg's grateful eyes answered him.

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"I think you had better arrange to go on with me to-morrow," he continued.

"Oh, to-morrow?"

"Yes. You come into Boston in the morning, and we will take the afternoon train."

It required some minutes to gain Miss Lydia's consent to the expedition under the new arrangement, as she did not like to disappoint Nora; but when Van Kirk bade her farewell, the matter had been amicably settled, and Nora had accepted the postponement of her anticipated travels.

At the door, as Miss Lydia was seeing her visitor out, he turned suddenly.

"Oh, by the way, Miss Bagg, have you plenty of money?"

She colored and gave an embarrassed little laugh, but drew herself up with a dignity born of the consciousness of freedom from debt.

"I have plenty of money for my journey, Mr. Van Kirk," she replied primly. She did not think it necessary to tell her new friend that plans for laying her hands on the requisite cash had been busily maturing underneath her curls for the last ten minutes.

"Oh, well," he said carelessly. "I will leave you a little something. Some need may come up between now and then." He took twenty-five dollars from his pocket-book, and laid the bills in Miss Bagg's thin hand.

One more sunshiny smile, and he was gone, while the calico-clad heiress, unconscious of the chill

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wind, watched him, as with erect, soldierly bearing he moved down the garden path. At the gate, seeing her still standing there, he raised his hat again.

Miss Lydia mechanically waved her hand. The bills fluttered in the breeze and brought her to herself with a start. She closed the door and looked at the money, counted it, folded the bills, and put them in her bosom. She stood for a minute with her back against the door, and wondered if she could be dreaming. There was a flavor of unreality already about the splendid young man who handed out greenbacks as though they were but paper; who looked kindly into her eyes and stated that henceforth his business was to stand between her and trouble; who called himself her servant; whose time belonged to her — her, Lydia Bagg.

She roused herself with an effort. If she were indeed awake, there was plenty to do between now and her early start in the morning. The situation was bewildering, intimidating, intoxicating, all in one. It was fortunate that Nora's garrulousness caused Miss Bagg's wits to keep pace with her busy hands.

The following day Miss Lydia took a solemn farewell of her family, after enjoining Nora to strict secrecy as to her errand.

"Be patient with the Judge," she warned, having many misgivings as to how the two would get on with no peace-maker to arbitrate between them. "Judgie-boy, take good care of Nora," she said affectionately, and the parrot's yellow eyes

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looked innocently back at her as he dropped his head to one side in a sentimental attitude. "Nora," she added solemnly, turning to the girl, "I am going to trust you with two dollars." She slowly held out the bill, and her maid took it with due respect and awe. "You are to buy fruit for the Judge and any little thing you may either of you need. I leave it to your judgment how to spend it. I have spoken to the butcher, and you are to have meat charged until I get back. I shall write to you every day, and I am sorry I can't tell you now where to write to me. Good-by, Nora."

The girl kissed her mistress' offered hand affectionately. "Ye do look that nice, Miss Bagg, the folks in the city ull all be wonderin' who ye are. Good-by, and the saints bless ye and bring ye safe home."

"No tears, Nora; no tears. I shall soon be back." And Miss Bagg went bravely forth, quaking a good deal internally, even at some moments almost to the extent of wishing that Uncle Jotham had made a will. Had she suspected that in that case her secretary would have been the heir, it is probable that she would heartily have wished it, so great was her admiration for that princely young man.

She could hardly believe, in spite of all that had gone before, that he would really be waiting for her in the station at Boston, yet there he was, looking bigger and stronger than ever, and able to fend off trouble from any number of slight little

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Lydia Baggs. The one who owned him greeted him gladly, and he took her heavy old valise, of antediluvian pattern and rubbed to a nondescript color, in his gloved hand.

"You ought to have had this checked," he said pleasantly. "I am certain you can hardly lift it. Is it all the baggage you brought?"

"Yes, I am sure it will be enough for such a short stay as I shall make."

Max looked at her thoughtfully. "Oh, yes," he replied. "Let us go to the ladies' room a minute and make our plans."

The truth was, he wished to gain time. It was as difficult for Miss Bagg's private secretary to adjust his ideas to an appreciation of her primitive notions as for her to expand hers to a generous plan of luxurious living. Her valise and her costume had suddenly confronted him with new difficulties. He had thought he wanted Ida Fuller in those days before Uncle Jotham's death had temporarily driven all romance out of his head, but never in his most infatuated moments had he longed for that clever young woman as he longed now. It had been instinctively repugnant to him to find that she had written so promptly to Miss Bagg, offering her services. Now he told himself that as a woman she had grasped the situation, and understood how necessary such an experienced person as herself would be to the newly rich. If she would only walk into this waiting-room now and take charge of Miss Bagg until they were en route

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for New York! But no such thing could happen, and here was Van Kirk, and here was Miss Bagg looking at him trustingly, and as unconscious of her queer bonnet and her queer cloak as though she had been five instead of fifty. Van Kirk himself, with a truly masculine vagueness in such matters, did not know what was the matter with these garments, but he knew something was so seriously wrong as to require heroic treatment. Time was flying and precious. He would begin on familiar ground, with the valise.

With a mental exhortation to himself to brace up, he began audaciously: —

"There is an hour or so before lunch, time to buy your new valise. I presume you were intending" — He paused and looked blandly at Miss Bagg, whose face expressed astonishment and hesitation.

"That was pa's. It is good and strong yet," she ventured.

"Yes, those things are astonishingly long-lived when they are well made," returned Max glibly; then he strode to the door of the waiting-room and signaled to a hackman. The latter hurried into the room, took up the deceased Mr. Bagg's traveling companion, and started off with it. Van Kirk followed with Miss Lydia. He handed her into the carriage, and, after giving an order to the driver, took his place beside her.

"Are you familiar with Boston?" he asked, as the horses started. Miss Bagg replied in the neg-

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ative, and he continued: "I have not been here myself since I was a child. I received my education in New York city and at West Point, and you know they keep one pretty close at the latter place."

"Yes, indeed. I know something about that, for there was a boy went there from our town. It made quite an excitement in Ashley when he received the appointment. Why," — Miss Bagg looked at her companion with new interest, — "why, are n't you in the army, then?"

"I have been until recently. I only tendered my resignation this year."

"You did n't like the life?"

"Not in all respects."

"You are not likely to like any life in all respects," observed Miss Bagg. She had at once in her imagination dressed her secretary in a highly composite but glittering uniform, and she liked the effect so well that she was quite displeased with him for relinquishing it.

"I shall try life now for a while, at any rate, in your service," he returned. "Here we are," — as the carriage drew up by the sidewalk.

Van Kirk helped Miss Bagg out, and together they entered a large trunk store, where the young man asked to see valises. He questioned Miss Bagg and suggested, but, seeing that it was hopeless to induce her quickly to make up her mind to pay the price for such articles as Max offered for her inspection, he selected one and ordered it sent

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out to the carriage. Then, choosing a small, silver-mounted hand-bag of alligator-skin, he gave it to mute Miss Lydia, and paid for the whole out of his own pocket.

Next he gave an order to the driver to take them to a large dry-goods establishment, and then followed his companion into the carriage.

"I have some money," remarked Miss Bagg, and Van Kirk noted that her voice was not quite steady.

"Of course you have, my dear madam," he replied respectfully. "That was your money I paid with. I did it to save time. Pardon me, if I did wrong."

"Oh, no," said Miss Lydia faintly. "You did quite right. What a pretty bag this is," — looking at the handsome little affair whose price had nearly taken away her breath.

"Yes, you will find it convenient. When you repack your clothing at the hotel there may be some little conveniences that you would like to have with you on the train. We will check the large bag."

"You think of everything," said Miss Lydia.

"I try to, of course, and that is why I am going to venture to advise you to indulge in a warmer coat. We are going to choose it now."

"Oh, my cloak is warm *enough*," exclaimed Miss Bagg decidedly.

Her secretary felt desperate. "You do not know the New York climate," he returned.

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"I've always heard it was warmer than ours," said Miss Lydia.

"Well, I am a New-Yorker born and bred. Take my advice and don't go to that city in this cloak. It is not suited to the place, I give you my word."

"Well," returned Miss Bagg meekly, feeling that she was indeed embarked upon such strange seas that it behooved her to be thankful that she had a pilot, and to heed his advice.

In a few minutes the carriage stopped again, and soon the oddly assorted pair of shoppers were confronted with the exceedingly "well-set-up" young woman, who would be happy to sell them a lady's wrap.

To her polite inquiries as to what description of garment Miss Bagg stood in need of, Miss Lydia turned a questioning look upon Van Kirk, who stood by, waiting. In his absolute ignorance on the subject, his one soothing thought was that whatever they selected would be at least modern.

"Try something on her," he said vaguely, to the saleswoman, who followed Miss Bagg's lead in mutely referring to him. "Something suitable for traveling," he added, under the influence of a brilliant inspiration.

"Oh, yes, something in cloth;" and skillful fingers at once set about divesting Miss Bagg of the roomy cloak which had been highly respected in the Ashley Congregational church for many winters.

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The wraps Miss Lydia tried on! The ordeal fairly made her head giddy, and her fastidious companion was at last pleased with a long, finely-braided garment which entirely hid her gray gown, and had its neck and sleeves finished with rich fur.

Van Kirk nodded as Miss Bagg turned about in it, and the saleswoman's practiced eye discerned his approval before he expressed it.

"I don't think your mother could *have* anything nicer or more stylish than this," she said glibly. "It fits her so well, too," etc.

His mother! Van Kirk thought of his mother, and of the awful eyes she would turn upon this comely young person could she have overheard the latter's mistake.

Poor Lydia turned crimson. Maxwell cut short the fluent encomiums of the clerk. "I think you had better decide upon that, Miss Bagg," he said with great distinctness.

It was the saleswoman's turn to be embarrassed, but she busied herself in unfastening the garment.

Van Kirk inquired its price.

"Fifty dollars," she replied.

"Oh" — protested the lay-figure faintly.

"That is about what you wanted to pay, I believe, Miss Bagg," said her secretary with prompt blandness. "And now if you" — turning to the young woman — "will be kind enough to show us where we can find bonnets." He turned back to Lydia. "You know how one thing leads on to

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another," he said, in a low tone. "One new garment necessitates another to match it."

Miss Bagg looked at him, half-bewildered, half-distressed. "My bonnet was new last winter," she replied.

"Well, if you can find one any prettier, it is your right to have it," said this subtle young man. "It won't do any harm to look at them, you know."

During this low-spoken colloquy there were many curious glances sent at the pair, and curiosity was heightened before the millinery question could be settled.

At last a bonnet was set above Miss Bagg's tuft of curls which was very becoming to her slender face. She smiled involuntarily as she caught sight of herself in the glass, but all the same it gave her what she herself described as "a turn" to hear her reckless companion agree to pay eighteen dollars for it.

"Where shall I send these things?" asked the milliner.

"The lady will wear them," returned the well-dressed man, whose relation to the countrified little woman was such an enigma to the onlookers.

"Then your other bonnet and cloak?" asked the clerk from the cloak department, who had accompanied the pair on their millinery quest.

"Do you care to keep them, Miss Bagg?" asked Van Kirk.

Care to keep them! Lydia looked with horror

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stricken eyes at her secretary. Less than one decade ago the beaver cloth in that cloak had been bought as first-class material in this city. Was the man mad?

"Of course I care to keep them," she returned somewhat severely.

"Then you might send them home to Ashley," suggested Max.

"Dear me. Nora would be frightened to death to see my clothes coming home without me. That would never do."

Van Kirk looked at his watch. "Write her a note to send with them. We have time." He looked more critically than before at Miss Bagg's gray dress. He knew it was not a pretty dress, and though he did not know that it was long on the shoulders and shapeless in the matter of "darts," he saw that it was somehow all wrong, but he did not feel himself equal to the strain of undertaking anything further in the way of feminine apparel. When the heiress walked abroad she would be wholly presentable in the garb they had selected, and while she was in the hotel he would see that her meals were served in her rooms until Ida Fuller could take his uncongenial task off his hands. Never since he abandoned a military life had Miss Bagg's secretary so fretted at civilization, so yearned to feel a good horse between his knees and to see a boundless prairie before him, as while he sat martyr-like on a velvet chair and watched Lydia try on bonnets. Now,

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while she indited her reassuring note to Nora, he took the opportunity to move away to a window, where he could at least see the daylight. He felt caged and stifled. It seemed to him he had endured existence in that buzzing emporium during an infinite period.

When Miss Bagg had finished her writing, the young lady who had sold her the cloak took charge of the letter, and Miss Lydia told her how to send the express package, and took out her purse to prepay the charges.

"And the new cloak and bonnet?" asked the girl politely. "Will you pay for them, or have them charged?"

This question found Miss Bagg on unfamiliar ground. She looked around wildly for that splendid living bulwark who had promised to stand between her and trouble. He was not in sight. For a minute Miss Lydia felt actually faint. Sudden and awful suspicions overwhelmed her. The long monotony of her life had been followed by so much excitement and novelty crowded into forty-eight hours that it is not wonderful that her nerves were on the surface, as the saying is. Where was Mr. Van Kirk? More than that, *who* was Mr. Van Kirk? The lawyer had not in his letter heralded or authorized him in any way. What a strange story he had told! What young man would resign his honorable commission in the army and float about ready for such an odd situation as the one he had accepted with her? How gullible she had

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been! If the statement that he had been in the army contained a grain of truth, he was, no doubt, a deserter, and now pursuing the calling of a confidence man. Of what a confidence man might be Miss Bagg had but a hazy comprehension; but she knew the fraternity practiced upon country people solely. Miss Lydia did not stop to consider what advantage the plausible young man could gain by his transactions with her up to the present hour. She was the victim of a momentary unreasoning panic, in which she feared that she had been trapped, that he had disappeared and deserted her, and that she was about to be disgraced before these civil young women; that if she were not accused of false pretenses and arrested, that Mr. Galbraith, the unknown lawyer, would reproach her for her course. Indeed, it would take too long to relate all the distracting thoughts which possessed Miss Bagg in the long half-minute that followed the saleswoman's query.

"You are not well," said the latter, perceiving her pallor. "Sit down. I will call the gentleman." But even as the young woman spoke, Miss Bagg saw something which drove color back to her face and remorse to her heart. It was the tall figure of her secretary walking toward her.

"I am quite well. Don't say anything," she exclaimed in a hurried, low tone.

Again Van Kirk produced what to Miss Bagg began to seem a Fortunatus's purse, and while he paid for her finery she dressed herself in it. When

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they next entered their carriage, such is the magic effect of fine feathers, there was no external incongruity in their companionship.

They drove to the Adams House, and there Miss Bagg was installed in a pleasant room, where, Max told her, after she had rested for half an hour a lunch would be served to them.

She spent the half hour while he left her alone in scolding herself for her temporary distrust of him; yet from time to time up would spring another question, as to why, if he were respectable, he should have been free to offer himself to her service; and following this would come the thought that perhaps she had now seen the last of him.

The fine new valise stood in a corner of the room, beside that of her father.

"I am the most absurd, foolish woman in the world," she declared, half-aloud, as she looked at it, "and the most ungrateful." She rose from the lounge where she had been lying, and, crossing the room, inspected herself in the glass, examining for the first time her gray hairs and the fine wrinkles which, though inconspicuous, were still wrinkles.

"The young woman thought I was his mother," she reflected. "To think I might be the mother of a fine man like him! He must be twenty-five. If this is really I, and that cloak and bonnet and valise and bag and private secretary are really mine, I ought to show myself a woman of some strength of mind, and not let my heart go jumping about so."

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Miss Lydia dropped her face in her hands, and breathed a very heartfelt little prayer for strength. So far her change of fortune had brought her more excitement than happiness, and anticipation of the coming days in New York weighed upon her mind.

At the appointed time Van Kirk allayed her teasing doubts of himself by putting in an appearance at her door. His quick eye perceived the worn look in her face.

"I am afraid you have not rested," he said kindly.

"I am really too excited to rest much," acknowledged Miss Bagg apologetically. "I," — with a little, nervous laugh, — "I have a horror of lawyers, Mr. Van Kirk."

"Yours is an exceedingly pleasant man to deal with," returned Max reassuringly. "Do not give him a second thought, yet. Any time spent in dreading an interview with Mr. Galbraith is wasted, I assure you. Besides, shall I not be with you, — and you are getting a little accustomed to me, I hope?"

The look of good-will with which the young man accompanied this smote Miss Lydia with such contrition as killed out all her suspicions.

"Mr. Van Kirk, you don't know how ashamed I am of myself," she said, her voice unsteady with feeling.

"Oh, no need of that," returned Van Kirk in a cheery, off-hand manner. He could not know the

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workings of the little woman's mind, and her voice sounded so alarmingly tearful that he welcomed a knock at the door which signified that their luncheon was served.

"You have no idea how much better you will feel after a good lunch," he said. "You must have had to take an early start this morning."

"Yes, indeed; breakfast at half past six," replied Miss Bagg, watching the laying of a little table with the well-ordered meal. She knew that meals served in the room were extra, and her habit of mind protested against the proceeding. Fortunately for her, she did not suspect the reason for this new extravagance of her secretary, and as they sat down to the table she could not regret their privacy, for he, seeing that she was rather depressed, exerted himself to entertain her, with perfect success.

Miss Bagg refused the glass of sherry he offered her, but enjoyed a comforting cup of tea. She did not know she was hungry when she sat down, but the food was tempting, Van Kirk's easy talk amusing, and she ate heartily.

In one of the young man's anecdotes of army life he mentioned his mother and Mrs. Fuller as being his guests the summer before.

"That Mrs. Fuller who wrote to me?" asked Miss Lydia.

"Yes. She is the daughter of my mother's brother, and will be a good and useful friend to you, Miss Bagg."

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"Ah! your cousin, then."

"Yes, and a favorite niece of my mother's."

"I shall be glad to know your mother," said Miss Lydia timidly.

Van Kirk felt moderately certain that the acquaintance would be the reverse of pleasant, but he only said: —

"You may not see her at once. She has not been well lately."

"Have you a father, too?" asked Miss Bagg.

"No. I scarcely remember him, I was so young when he died. Uncle Jotham was the only father I ever knew."

Lydia looked at the speaker pensively. "He ought to have provided for you," she said, "but perhaps you are well off."

"I consider myself so in being engaged by you," returned Van Kirk, with that inscrutable smile which had a silencing effect, for all its brightness. "Now," — pushing his chair back from the table, — "I will leave you once more while you attend to your packing. I suppose you will want the old valise sent back to Ashley?"

"Yes, and I will write another note to go in it to poor Nora."

"Very well. When you are ready we will drive about a little and see something of the city before train time, if you would like to do so."

Of course Miss Bagg would like to. She had that whole-souled reverence for Boston common to the residents of her State.

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The middle of the afternoon found a little lady, richly but soberly dressed, seated in a parlor car in the Boston and Albany depot. A new and elegant hand-bag reposed in her lap, and in the chair next her was seated a man of imposing proportions and presence. As the train pulled smoothly out of the depot he caught her eye and smiled.

"Good-by to the old life," he said.

The lady looked startled, and the eyes that gazed at him grew moist.

He shook his head slowly, still smiling. "No, nothing to be afraid of," he continued. "Everything to anticipate. I wish you joy."

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CHAPTER VII.

MOTHER AND SON.

THE following morning Mr. Van Kirk ran up the steps of a house in New York, and gave his card to the servant who answered his ring.

"If my mother is not well, ask Mrs. Fuller if she will see me."

He passed into the reception-room and waited. Almost immediately a light step sounded on the stairs, and Ida Fuller entered the room with outstretched hand.

"What news?" she asked eagerly.

"It is all right," returned Max, pressing her hand. "I brought her, and have her safely corraled at the Fifth Avenue."

"What is she like?" — again eagerly.

"She is a lady," said Van Kirk briefly.

"So much the better," returned Mrs. Fuller with an air of satisfaction. "Won't you sit down?"

"Is n't mother going to see me? How is she?"

The young widow smiled carelessly. "She is well in body; much to her disgust, I think, for mentally she is still much disturbed. I really do not know whether she is ready to see company, for

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when the servant told me you had come I was so eager to see you that I hurried down without going to Aunt Elinor's room."

The visitor's eyes shone. "Were you?" he began, and leaving his chair at a little distance from her sofa, he seated himself beside her.

"Yes," she interrupted hastily. "I was very curious to learn the outcome of your errand."

The young man's face lost its brightness. "Miss Bagg showed me a note from you," he said.

Mrs. Fuller smiled and flushed a little. "Yes, I wrote that before your sudden departure was decided upon."

"It seemed hardly strange to be confronted with your handwriting," continued Max, his eyes still fixed seriously upon her. "I had been thinking of you on my way. You know, Ida, do you not, that in all the experience I have passed through, the chief pang to me has been in the thought of you?"

"Don't think of me, then, I beg," she returned flippantly, smiling into the grave eyes.

He took her hand. "I hoped to have so much to give you," he said, his voice vibrating. "I hoped to make you a queen in station as you are by nature."

Mrs. Fuller's thin lips compressed themselves, and she tried to withdraw her hand. A slight frown contracted the fair forehead. "This is uncousinly sort of talk, Max," she answered.

He gazed at her, perplexed and incredulous.

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Uncousinly! Had the glances, the smiles, the songs, the half-formed phrases with which she had flattered him been cousinly? But her face expressed something very like impatience. He dropped her hand. She immediately flashed an upward glance at him and spoke in a changed tone.

"You have no need to tell me. I know you to be the most generous fellow in the world," she said with fervor, and was gone.

In less than five minutes he heard her summons from the head of the stairs. He ascended, and walked into the large, comfortable, rose-scented room where his mother was nursing her injuries. Mrs. Fuller followed him.

"Well, mother," he began heartily, approaching the easy-chair from which his parent, enveloped in a voluminous silk wrapper, made no effort to rise.

"Well, my son," she returned, with a sepulchral dignity which he dreaded.

He kissed her. "I am glad to hear from Ida that you are feeling well again."

It was an unfortunate beginning. Mrs. Van Kirk bent a cold glance upon her niece. "Indeed? Ida is very kind to be so hopeful about me. Do you think it helped me to recover, to hear that you had demeaned yourself by going down into the backwoods in search of that woman, who is to live in your house and spend your money while you delve for your daily bread?"

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Max seated himself. "I did n't think it worth while to bother you with plans before I went," he replied. "I knew you were n't up to the discussion of details."

"It strikes me," continued Mrs. Van Kirk, with an air of outraged dignity, "that Mr. Galbraith would have shown better taste and more courtesy to have gone himself, or chosen some one besides you — you of all people — to send on such an errand."

"Oh, I had nothing else to do," said Max carelessly. "I was knocking about, a nuisance to myself and everybody else. I was just the man for the undertaking. At least, I flatter myself that I carried it out very well."

"You found the creature?" asked Mrs. Van Kirk.

"Yes, found her without any trouble, for, Mr. Galbraith having taken all precautions to identify her, I knew, of course, where she was."

Mrs. Van Kirk waved her hand haughtily. "The whole affair is too outrageous to discuss," she said.

"Very well, we won't discuss it. I must go on now to Mr. Galbraith's. I stopped here first, not knowing but that you were quite recovered and would like to drive over to the hotel and call on Miss Bagg."

"Maxwell Van Kirk!" — in awful tones of surprise. "Did you bring that woman back with you?"

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"Certainly; that was my errand."

"And you thought I would call on her, would recognize her?"

"I supposed you would, of course, under the circumstances."

"Max says she is a lady," remarked Mrs. Fuller.

"Absurd!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Kirk, her nostrils dilating.

"I must tell you," continued her son, "that I have gone into business relations with her. We have agreed that I shall be her secretary."

Mrs. Van Kirk looked in blank indignation and amaze from him to his cousin and back again. "Maxwell, I cannot believe you," she said, sitting erect now and speaking with nervous energy. "Where is your pride? What were you thinking of?"

"Delving for my daily bread, as you remarked a minute ago. I have the vaguest notion as to what delving may signify, but I am pretty certain that I shall not find any better opportunity for getting into harness than this."

"Any other way would be better!" exclaimed his mother.

"I think he has done wisely. Mr. Galbraith thinks so, too," said Ida Fuller unguardedly.

"Then you knew of it!" Mrs. Van Kirk's face flamed. "It is a plot."

"Mother, my dear mother," — Max rose impatiently — "for pity's sake don't be melodramatic.

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Find me a better position than the one I have taken with Miss Bagg and I will accept it gladly — after a while. I have promised to see her launched into her new life." He looked from his mother to his cousin. "Let me comprehend the situation. Do I understand that you both intend to cut Miss Bagg?"

"I do not, by any means," replied Ida distinctly. "I shall call on her immediately, if you think best."

"Curry favor with her, if you like, Ida Fuller," said Mrs. Van Kirk angrily; "but let me tell you I am ashamed of my brother's child when I find she is capable of such an action."

"Mother, you pass all limits," said Van Kirk wearily. "Do you believe I am currying favor with Miss Bagg?"

The angry woman looked into the honest eyes, as clear now as when their beauty had thrilled her heart as her baby looked up from her breast.

"Oh, my boy, no," she replied distractedly.

"It is a kindness in Ida to visit her," he went on. "She is a woman of perhaps fifty, who has lived an obscure life in the country, and she is overwhelmed by the change in her circumstances. She has n't the right clothes to appear in. She needs a woman's help. I give you my word I had an awful time getting her a new bonnet in Boston."

Mrs. Fuller burst into laughter, and Mrs. Van Kirk, after one final stare, followed suit.

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Max had not intended to be amusing, but he knew it was a point gained to have made his mother laugh.

"I did," he continued, "and I bought her a cloak or a coat or something of the kind, too; but she needs a dress. I have n't said anything about it. It was all I could do to insist upon the other things without hurting her feelings. Ida is just the one to befriend her. Put on your hat now, Ida, if you can spare the time, and come and meet her."

Mrs. Fuller rose and left the room. Mrs. Van Kirk composed her features. "Well, all I can say is, it is a very odd state of affairs that this woman should have impoverished and crushed us all, and that we should turn around and take care of her in this fashion. I can tell you that it is n't the way of the world. What caps the climax, though, is that you should accept service under her, — service, that is what it is. Why evade it?"

"Why, indeed?" asked Van Kirk. "Look the situation in the face. I was completely afloat — completely at a loss. Where and how was I to set about getting something to do? I slipped into this position easily, and hope to fit it as the square peg fits the square hole. I hope you will think better of your determination not to meet my employer."

"Ugh!" Mrs. Van Kirk lifted her shoulders in repugnance, and now Mrs. Fuller returned, equipped for her errand.

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Max looked at her with admiring eyes. Her ensemble was elegance itself. "Ready so soon? You are a model woman, Ida," he said in surprise.

They took leave of Mrs. Van Kirk and set out in the raw, dull weather. They went first to Mr. Galbraith's.

The lawyer greeted them kindly, addressing the young man with especial warmth.

"All has gone well, Mr. Galbraith," said Max cheerfully, when they were ushered into his office. "Miss Bagg is in the city, and if you will make an appointment I will bring her here."

The lawyer passed his hand over his strong, smooth-shaven chin. "How does she take her good fortune?" he asked.

"Oh, with some excitement and natural bewilderment. By the way, Mr. Galbraith, I want to request you to say nothing to her of my former expectations. I did not mention the circumstances to her, and it will be better for that knowledge not to intervene between us; for behold in me" — Max smote himself lightly on the breast — "Miss Lydia Bagg's private secretary."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Galbraith with interest.

"Yes. I offered myself and was accepted."

"At a liberal salary, I hope?"

"We agreed to take you into the conclave which should decide my salary."

The lawyer bit his lip and looked thoughtfully at the young man. Ida Fuller's bright gaze rested on the lawyer.

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"How would ten thousand dollars a year suit you, Mr. Van Kirk?" asked the latter, at last.

"I could n't earn it," replied Max shortly.

"Nonsense!" burst irrepressibly from Mrs. Fuller's scarlet lips.

Mr. Galbraith drummed slowly and rhythmically with his fingers on his desk. "I want to say to you, Mr. Van Kirk, what I have never said before to anybody. I am certain that Mr. Bagg intended to leave the bulk of his fortune to you. He never said so in terms, but the hints he let fall were unmistakable. The last will which he made, and which I drew for him, left you a large property. That will cannot be found. It is my sincere belief that he destroyed it, intending to draw another which should be still more largely in your favor. The hints and remarks which I referred to lead me to believe this. He trusted you more and more as years went on. He took means to discover how you lived when you were far from him. He watched you, not in the spirit of a spy, but in order to learn if you were indeed as he hoped you might be, — a fit person to bear the responsibility of the burden of gold which shortly must drop from him. When he had satisfied himself, he recalled you from the army. Now, he would not have done that, had he not intended to give you something in place of your military prospects."

"No," agreed Max, "I believe he did so intend. I have always believed it."

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"Then why hesitate to accept as large a salary as Miss Bagg is willing to pay you? Will she be inclined to be generous, think you?"

"She will take what you and I say as law and gospel," replied Max. "She is very simple and unsophisticated. Anything above a hundred dollars will seem so large to her that one amount will sound about like another in her ears."

"Indeed, indeed," said the lawyer thoughtfully. "Poor Mr. Bagg. What would he have said could he have foreseen this and known himself helpless to prevent it! Well, Mr. Van Kirk, in the light of what I have told you, you need not hesitate to accept ten thousand a year, you see."

"In fact, it would be wrong — wrong to Cousin Jotham — for you to refuse that or even much more," added Mrs. Fuller earnestly.

Van Kirk shook his head. "Oh, don't talk about such a sum as that," he said. "I don't aspire to any very fine-spun ideas of honesty, but I should like to continue to eat and sleep with myself with a certain degree of complacency. I don't believe the position is worth such a salary. After a while Miss Bagg is bound to become worldly wise, and I should not wish her to waken some fine morning to the suspicion that she was being robbed."

"You are doing wrong — wrong!" said Mrs. Fuller bitterly. Her eyes sparkled, and Max was surprised at the feeling she displayed.

"I am doing as right as I know how, Ida," he

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replied simply. "Wait, — I am not going to accept a starvation salary. Tell me, Mr. Galbraith, not speaking as my friend, but as Miss Bagg's lawyer and in the interests of your client. You know better than I what work her secretary will have to perform. What ought she to pay him?"

The lawyer looked with his sharp eyes straight into the questioning ones bent upon him. "Ten thousand dollars would not be an unreasonable salary," he said. "The duties of a secretary will expand largely in your case, but I think she could get the work well done for six thousand."

"Very well, I will take six thousand," answered Van Kirk. He turned to his cousin with a humorous look. "It is more than the pay of a second-lieutenant in the United States army," he added.

Ida gave him no answering smile. This was not a laughing matter to her. She loved this man's beauty and strength with the admiration of which she was capable, but it had not been the second-lieutenant whom she caressed with her glances. They had been for the probable heir to millions. Now he was voluntarily repulsing the last chance of winning his way into her favor. She was furious with him, and had great ado to conceal her wrath. It sparkled from her eyes and lay in the twitching of her thin lips.

"Well, you must do as you think right, of course," said the lawyer with a sigh. "It is a sorry business, but we must make the best of it."

"And when will you meet Miss Bagg?" asked Max, as he rose.

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"This afternoon at three, if it suits her."

Van Kirk and his fair companion came out again into the air, the former quite unconscious of the emotion seething in the breast so near him. Ida's clever wits were working fiercely. One hope was left. She would, when the right time came, disregard her cousin's request for secrecy — she had promised nothing — and lay the facts before Miss Bagg, trusting to the latter's honor to make such restitution as she might to the wronged young man. Failing in accomplishing anything by this means, she would hope by the influence she meant to gain over the heiress to advance her own interests to the highest possible point, leaving Max on the low ground he seemed determined to occupy.

"You won't forget her dress, Ida," said the unconscious Van Kirk anxiously, as they neared the hotel.

"I should imagine from what you tell me of her that it would be difficult to forget it," returned Mrs. Fuller crisply.

"It is a kind of dusty color," observed Max reminiscently, "and the sleeves — well, I wonder what is the matter with the sleeves. Ought they to be gored nowadays?"

Ida smiled reluctantly.

"Well, if sleeves ought to be gored now, Miss Bagg's are not, and if they ought not to be, Miss Bagg's are. See?"

"I shall see shortly, for here we are. Will you go first and announce me?"

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"No; she has a parlor, where I am sure she will be ready to receive us."

Ready and eager to see her secretary Miss Bagg was indeed, for the morning had seemed long to her. She hurried to the door at the sound of his voice, but the pleasure died from her face and anxiety took its place when she perceived beside him a slight, elegant woman, dressed in a close-fitting, black cloth suit, with a hint of golden color here and there, and black ostrich tips with touches of yellow clinging close to her jet-black hair.

"I have brought my cousin, Mrs. Fuller," said Max, and Ida came forward with outstretched black-gloved hand and a cordial smile.

"I have introduced myself already to you, Miss Bagg," she said, "in the letter I wrote before I knew Mr. Van Kirk was coming to you. Of course, as soon as I heard you were to have his efficient assistance, I knew you would have no need of me; yet I wanted to be among the first of your new-found relatives to greet you."

"Relatives?" repeated Miss Bagg meekly, into whose eyes Ida's black ones had been gazing, while she held Lydia's hand and poured forth the above.

"Why, of course, we are relatives," said Mrs. Fuller, moving into the room side by side with Miss Bagg. "It does n't do to inquire into the relationship too closely, but it is there, Miss Bagg; take my word for it; it is there." Ida laughed pleasantly. "When poor Cousin Jotham was alive

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we never tried to work out the cousinly problem, but accepted it as an agreeable fact. You and Mr. Van Kirk and his mother and I belong to one another; that is enough to know." And Mrs. Fuller nodded engagingly and took the chair Max placed for her. He was as much amused as agreeably surprised at this extreme cordiality, for he knew this was a rare ebullition for the proud Ida.

Miss Bagg looked at the latter, fascinated. "I have had no relatives for so long," she said slowly, the agreeable glow brought her by this novel idea counteracted by the vague constraint she felt in the presence of this assured and handsome woman.

"Well, you will have to submit to them now. You have inherited them. Cousin Jotham claimed us, and now we claim you. You must try to like us."

"I like Mr. Van Kirk," said Lydia simply, looking at her secretary, who after seating her had himself taken a chair, completing the semi-circle around the cheerful, glowing, open fire.

"Then you will like us all," declared Mrs. Fuller, with graceful audacity, "for we are so nearly related we must be similar. By the way, perhaps my cousin has told you that his mother is ill. She was very sorry to be unable to call upon you at once, but she sent her compliments and best wishes."

Max regarded the speaker with open astonishment.

"What pleasant apartments you have," continued Ida, looking about her.

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"Oh, yes. Mr. Van Kirk knows how to make things pleasant and comfortable," replied Miss Bagg gratefully. "There never was such a man for thinking of everything."

Ida sent a little satirical smile across at Max. She felt like rallying him on his evident conquest. Lydia seemed to her so quaint and old-fashioned and simple. Although Mrs. Fuller had given her as yet little opportunity to speak, she had jumped to the conclusion that the rustic maiden would be very easy to manipulate and very grateful for guidance. Already she exulted in the power she should be behind the little woman's throne, and congratulated herself upon her own prompt appearance in the field of action.

"How have you passed the morning, Miss Bagg?" asked Max.

"Well" — she hesitated. "I have — I tried to read the story you gave me, but" —

"But your own story was more interesting?" suggested Van Kirk with a smile, as she stopped.

Miss Lydia squeezed her thin hands together in her lap. "I don't know. I got to thinking about the lawyer."

"How pleasantly surprised you will be when you meet Mr. Galbraith," said Max with hearty reassurance, "and that will be this afternoon at three."

"Yes?" returned Lydia, an excited color creeping up into her cheeks. "You will come with me, won't you?"

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"You have only to order it, you know," replied Max, with a wave of his hand. "Am I not your servant?"

Miss Bagg turned to Ida. "I cannot get used to that, you know," she said naively.

"He has n't the air of being anybody's servant, has he?" returned Mrs. Fuller, with a little laugh. It came over her with a sudden rush of anger and amaze, how much this ill-dressed, faltering, insignificant old maid had deprived her of.

It was true, Mr. Galbraith had said it, that Jotham Bagg meant to give his wealth to this man who needed only the glory of gold to shine above all men that she had ever seen.

It was true, Max had said it, that he had meant the treasure to be hers so soon as it should come into his hands.

Anger, even momentary hatred of unconscious Lydia, filled the poor soul as the realization of it all assailed her. She felt that her lips trembled, and she rose and moved to a window.

"Yes, I shall go with you, of course," continued Max, "but first let us invite Mrs. Fuller to remain and take lunch with us."

"Oh, yes. I hope your cousin will stay," said Miss Bagg politely, and Mrs. Fuller turned from the window with a smile and murmur of acceptance.

"Come into the bedroom, won't you," added Lydia, rising, "and lay off your bonnet?"

"Meanwhile I will go and order luncheon," said

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Max, also rising, and as he left the room he met his cousin's eye with a glance which conjured her not to forget what he had brought her there for. Mrs. Fuller felt somewhat hysterical. There was something ridiculous in the situation, but she turned from its humorous aspect with decision. She meant to make it a serious and serviceable situation for herself.

Miss Bagg led her into the sleeping-room adjoining, and stood by while the young woman removed her bonnet.

"Do you mean to make the Fifth Avenue your home for the winter?" asked Ida.

"No, no, indeed. That is, I have n't thought anything about it. Of course I don't know, but it never seemed to me that one could have a home-feeling in a hotel."

"You are quite right, I am sure. Have you been accustomed to housekeeping?"

"Yes. I have kept house ever since my sister died, fifteen years ago. I don't think I could be contented to board. I have been very happy in my little home." Miss Bagg breathed an unconscious sigh. The uncertainty and uneasiness which always assailed her in these new surroundings when Max was out of sight was not lessened by the presence of this fine lady whose rings sparkled beautifully as she pulled off her gloves. Oh, peaceful Ashley! When would she again behold it?

"Then you are not alone in the world," hazarded

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Ida, with a sensation of disappointment. Strangely, it had not occurred to her that this spinster might have near and dear ones who would enter with her into her kingdom. Why had she not thought to question Max about this?

"No, indeed," returned Miss Bagg. "I have Nora and the Judge. How they are missing me!"

The mention of the Judge was even more disconcerting to Mrs. Fuller than it had been to Mr. Wilkins. A man other than Max in connection with Miss Bagg's affairs would be surely subversive of the enterprising widow's plans. She looked blank for a moment, but quickly recovered herself.

"Oh, well, you have a pleasant set of duties before you," she said brightly, "shopping and house-hunting; and I flatter myself that I can really be of service to you in both lines. Do you think you will prefer a house, or an apartment?"

Miss Bagg looked at her with patient inquiry. "Oh, I don't believe I would try to live in one room," she said. "It would n't be necessary — that is, Mr. Van Kirk said I could afford" —

"Ah! pardon me. I meant to suggest a flat. For a very small family — say, of three — one can find a great deal of comfort in a well-chosen flat."

"Oh, is that it? A flat," echoed Miss Bagg thoughtfully. "I will think about it."

They returned to the other room and sat down

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before the fire, Mrs. Fuller, as her hostess preceded her, bending a scornful and scrutinizing gaze on the gray gown which was influencing the heiress' secretary to have their luncheon served in her parlor.

"I suppose, Miss Bagg," she began archly, "you have enough of woman's weakness to have counted upon selecting some new gowns as one of the pleasures of coming to New York?"

"No, indeed, I did not. I did not count upon any pleasure in coming to New York; that is," — afraid she had been ungracious, — "this is a business trip, you know."

"Yes, but when you have seen Mr. Galbraith, and business is quite off your mind, you must let me show you some of our shops. We are very proud of them, I assure you."

"We were in an elegant store in Boston," observed Miss Bagg. "Mr. Van Kirk did n't think the cloak I had was suited to this climate, he is so thoughtful, and we bought another and a bonnet. I shall never go shopping with him again, though," added Lydia with a little laugh. "I should n't dare tell you what we paid for those things."

"I dare say," remarked Mrs. Fuller, smiling at the fire. "A man cannot be expected to have much judgment in such matters. Let me help you about your dresses, — that is, if you will accept my help. I think two heads are better than one in every case; I know I cannot bear to select a gown alone."

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"I had n't thought of needing a new dress," said Lydia doubtfully.

"But, dear Miss Bagg," exclaimed Mrs. Fuller, gently, "you will, of course, wish to go into mourning."

"I have been thinking of that," admitted Lydia. "You see my new bonnet is all black."

"Yes, but that coat and bonnet are not mourning. I will help you" —

"I do not believe in crape," declared Miss Bagg, so decidedly that Ida could not continue. "I think it would be respectful, though, to Uncle Jotham for me to wear a black dress."

"You could hardly do otherwise. Your position, Miss Bagg, will demand certain changes and concessions which, of course, you will be glad to make." Ida's impressive tone and vague suggestions were discomforting to Lydia. "What did very well for you a month ago will not do for you now, believe me," continued the widow. "Mr. Van Kirk will tell you the same thing. Ah, I think I hear his step now."

Max knocked and entered. Mrs. Fuller at once addressed him.

"Miss Bagg and I are planning a little shopping expedition for to-morrow morning," she announced.

"Very well," he returned, "and now I hope you both have good appetites, for luncheon will be served at once."

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CHAPTER VIII.

MISS BAGG IS TRANSPLANTED.

NOT even the hasty notes of reassurance and explanation which Miss Bagg sent home with her discarded possessions could inspire perfect confidence in Nora that all was well with her beloved mistress. There was a certain gruesomeness about the collapsed valise, whose sides she had recently beheld so importantly full, and a mournful significance in the limp cloak, and the bonnet, which she had long been accustomed to respect whether reposing in state on the shelf in the spare-room closet, or adorning Miss Bagg on solemn or festive occasions. How eloquent of the absent one was every button and bow! Nora handled the articles with awe, and gave her head many a shake as she restored them to their closet, feeling when she had closed the door as though there had been a funeral in the house.

"Sure I wish her safe home," she muttered. It seemed to her the Judge had never been so prone as now to loud and discordant laughter, to barking, mewing, cackling and otherwise comporting, himself unlike a Christian. His lack of sympathetic feeling constrained Nora to keep the door

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closed between his part of the house and hers as much as possible.

Neighbors dropped in in numbers when it became noised abroad that Miss Bagg had done so unprecedented a thing as to go on an unannounced journey. Her sister-women felt justly incensed that she had not confided in any one, nor shared her anticipations with a single soul. There were rumors afloat of a strange man who had been observed going to and from the Bagg dwelling, and other rumors that, subsequent to Miss Bagg's clandestine departure, large, mysterious parcels had arrived for Nora at the express office. When it was discovered that no amount of neighborly dropping in and questioning could elicit more from the Irish girl than that her mistress had gone away on business, and when argus eyes perceived Nora's depression, some even claiming to have observed her furtively wiping away tears, tongues wagged furiously, and it was unanimously decided that whatever might be the outcome and explanation of Lydia Bagg's conduct, for the present *it did not look well!*

At last Miss Bagg had been gone six days, and her neighbors, having given up the hopeless task of interviewing Nora, were in a feverish state of curiosity. The girl could not be induced to disclose even the contents of the tantalizing packages.

She had been so cunningly cajoled and plied that she felt at bay, and scowled when on Saturday morning she heard the door-bell ring. Still

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frowning, she opened the door, and beheld no less a personage than Mrs. Judge Spencer, who lived in Boston a part of every year, and whose visits were matters held in high esteem even by Miss Bagg, whose position every one knew had always been unimpeachable in Ashley society, in spite of the fact that she was willing often to accommodate her neighbors by doing some of their family sewing.

"Good morning, Nora," said the great lady pleasantly. "I was driving by, and I stopped to ask a few questions."

The girl's lips tightened. It would be serious business to oppose Mrs. Spencer, but the faithful soul knew no compromise.

"I have been hearing all sorts of crazy stories about Miss Bagg," continued the visitor. "When did she leave town?"

"Last Monday, mem. She went on business, mem."

"Is she in any trouble?" Mrs. Spencer looked into the girl's eyes with a different expression from that which Nora had lately observed in the faces of her interlocutors. Something in the questioner's directness and sympathy touched the soft heart.

"I guess not, mem." Nora's eyes moistened. "I had a short letter from her this mornin', mem, and she said she was nervous and busy, but she did n't say she was n't well, nor she did n't say she was in trouble."

"That is good. She is naturally nervous and

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busy at such a time. It must all be very exciting to her. Did she tell you before she went away of any change, a great change which has come to her?"

Nora looked at the visitor with quick suspicion. Perhaps this was but a new manner of effort to extract her knowledge from her.

Mrs. Spencer smiled. "I see you do know," she added, "and I dare say you have been greatly cross-questioned. I know all about it, as the lawyers applied to my husband for help in the matter."

Nora breathed freely. "I 'm glad ye do know, mem," she replied, with evident relief.

"We are likely to see a change in Miss Bagg's way of living. I wanted to say to you, Nora, that if circumstances separate you from Miss Bagg I shall have a place for you in my house. I know you have been well trained."

"Oh, mem, I could n't leave her," exclaimed poor Nora, in wide-eyed dismay.

"And I hope you will not have to; but in case circumstances make it necessary, why, come to me. Good-by, Nora;" and Mrs. Spencer departed to her phaeton, leaving Miss Bagg's maid in a considerably more lachrymose condition than before. Happily the arrival of Miss Lydia herself that afternoon cut short Nora's fiery trial from inquisitiveness without and depressing apprehensions within.

She had just been mending the parlor fire to a running accompaniment of the parrot's irrelevant comments, when, turning around, she saw her mistress open the gate.

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"It's her! It's her!" exclaimed the girl with sudden delight, and she ran to open the door, and flew down the path, waving her arms and expressing joy in every feature. Miss Bagg smiled, as well she might, submitting to have her gloved hands clasped and kissed with fervor.

"And ye're all right! Ye're all right!" cried Nora, beaming, as she followed Miss Bagg into the house.

"Yes, I am all right, and how is the Judge? How are you, Judgie?" Miss Lydia entered the parlor and advanced to the cage, where the parrot bit the wires and climbed and chattered, showing in his way as much excitement as Nora.

Lydia began to take off her gloves, and turned back to her maid.

"I gave you a surprise, didn't I? I feel as if I had been gone a year."

The girl stared at her in curious, admiring, dumb amazement. It was as though the discarded habiliments over which she had wept had indeed been a husk, out of which Miss Bagg had slipped, a transformed creature.

"Ye look iligant," she said at last, touching her mistress' rich furs with one reverent red finger. "Mrs. Spincer has n't got the like o' thim."

"How strange! How strange!" said Miss Bagg, looking about her. "Is this the room I left one little week ago?"

"Why, what's wrong with it, mem?" asked Nora anxiously.

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"It is a very little room," said Lydia pensively, "and it is very shabby, indeed. Yet shall I be any happier? Who knows?"

"Happier how, Miss Bagg?"

"To leave it all and live in New York."

"Will ye do that, mem?" cried the girl apprehensively.

"Yes, I expect to do that."

"Oh, take me, take me, Miss Bagg! Don't ye lave me, oh, don't! Mrs. Spincer wants me, but I'll die without ye. Oh, take me with ye, do take me!" begged Nora, wild and trembling with excitement at her mistress' changed appearance and the vague wonders in the air.

"Why, you poor silly child, of course I shall take you. What idea has possession of you? What is this about Mrs. Spencer? Sit down and tell me about it."

At this Nora began to control her sudden sobbing, and, obediently seating herself, gave her mistress an account of the excitement her departure had caused in town, ending with the interview of the morning between herself and Mrs. Spencer.

"You have been a good, faithful girl," said Miss Bagg approvingly, when the story was finished. "Mrs. Spencer meant very kindly, but I could n't think of giving you up."

She gazed into her maid's flushed, grateful face. "New York is a big, lonely place, Nora. I want you with me there."

"Whin are we go'ne, mem?" — smiles and eagerness now taking the place of woe.

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"Very soon. As soon as we can. I am going to explain things to you, Nora," said Miss Bagg, slipping her fingers between the wires of the bird's cage in response to the beseeching "Scratch" which had succeeded to a violent parody on Nora's sobs.

"I had a rich uncle in New York, and now that he has died his property has become mine. The gentleman who came to see me here, Mr. Van Kirk, is going to help me manage the property. He and the lawyer think it would be better for me to live in New York. He has a cousin there, a Mrs. Fuller, who came to call on me and was very kind. She went around with me a great deal, hunting for a good place to be my home; but we found the search a difficult one. At last the lawyer said: 'Why not, for this winter at least, live in your uncle's house? It is old-fashioned but comfortable, and the housekeeper is still there taking care of it.' Well, we went to see it, and I decided, although it is a very large place — I decided to use it."

"It 's your house, thin, Miss Bagg?"

"Yes, it is my house," replied Lydia, feeling the strangeness of it all very keenly as she sat there in the old home talking with Nora. "Mr. Van Kirk will live with us for the greater convenience of managing my affairs. I did not like the idea of living under the rule of that housekeeper, so Mr. Van Kirk promised to give her some money, which he says she ought to have, and

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to send her away. Mrs. Fuller has undertaken to get my cook and an experienced girl to take care of the rooms."

"Sure an' ain't I yer cook, Miss Bagg?" asked Nora, again dissatisfied.

"You and I must both become new people now," replied Lydia kindly. "Mrs. Fuller said I must have a maid, — some one to help me dress, and do my little errands, and brush my dresses. I told her I had one." Miss Bagg smiled benignantly into the honest, freckled face. Mrs. Fuller would have smiled, too, with a different expression, could she have surveyed Nora now as a candidate for such a situation.

"And ye meant me?" exclaimed the delighted girl. "I 'll be 'round wid ye more than iver. Hooroo!"

"Yes. All you will have to do will be to take care of the Judge and me."

The following day being Sunday, Miss Bagg created a great sensation by her appearance at church. The story of her good fortune had become known, and sped from eager mouth to mouth. Before another Sunday came around the little house which had known her for half a century was deserted and closed. She had made her fond adieus to Ashley.

Guided by Mr. Van Kirk, — even in a matter so important as the disposition of the Judge, — Miss Bagg had had a box made for his transportation by express to his new home. In this she had placed

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oranges, bananas, and other delicacies, finally placing within, the astonished Judge himself, who whispered soliloquies in the darkness, in great perplexity of spirit.

Nora rapped on the outside of his box.

"Come in!" cried the Judge, with prompt distinctness.

"Oh, the poor bir'rd. Niver moind, Joodgie," said Nora, too kind-hearted to triumph over her trapped foe, "I can't come in, but ye 'll be there to meet us."

"I do hope and pray he may," exclaimed Miss Bagg, quite pale. "It does seem very cruel, Nora." And when Miss Lydia and her maid, the latter quite presentable in the garb her mistress had bought her in Boston, arrived one Saturday evening in New York, the first words Miss Bagg addressed to her secretary, who was in waiting at the Forty-second Street depot, were relative to the well-being of the parrot.

"He is right as a trivet," replied Van Kirk. "Have you been anxious about him? I ought to have telegraphed."

"Oh, no; that would have been a needless ex—" began Miss Lydia hastily, but halted. She was commencing to learn the difficult lesson that nothing which might possibly add to her comfort would in this new world be considered a needless expense.

Max had handed her and Nora into a carriage, and now seated himself opposite. The door slammed, and the horses started.

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"Well, Mr. Van Kirk," sighed Miss Bagg, "I feel as though I had burned my bridges behind me."

"Did you sell the house?"

Miss Lydia's face in the darkness expressed reproach at the lightly put question.

"No, indeed, but I have given away or packed up everything, and the poor little place looks so lonely. I could n't help feeling guilty as I turned the key at last, as though I were voluntarily deserting old friends for new."

"Yes; that is because you are tired," answered Van Kirk kindly. "Well, Nora, what do you think of coming to New York to live?"

"I think 't is foine, sir." Nora was gazing from the window at the panorama of lights, full of amaze and delight at thus resting upon the soft cushions of the carriage and whirling through the novel scene. "I can't think 't is me at all, sir," she added.

"Nora never rode in the cars until to-day," explained Miss Bagg. "She has enjoyed it very much. She is only seventeen, and can take a child's pleasure in everything."

The rest of the drive was accomplished in silence. Miss Lydia was tired. The last week had been even more full of excitement and emotion than the one preceding it. She was glad to lean her head back in the corner of the carriage and relinquish all care. Nora continued her rapt gaze from the window. Van Kirk gave himself up to thoughts

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of his cousin Ida, whose baffling and tantalizing behavior had, despite his late preoccupation with novel duties, continued to perplex and bewilder him more than ever as to her real sentiments. Reluctant as he was to believe it, he could not conceal from himself the fact that her manner had changed toward him since Mr. Bagg's death. He made apologies for her. He did not admire her less because she was ambitious. In fact, it would be impossible to separate ambition from the fair widow's identity. Even though she loved him, the blow to the expectations she had had the right to harbor in connection with him would have been sufficiently severe to alter her manner. Van Kirk was eager to explain and excuse her conduct. He clung to the belief that her regard for him was deep and would triumph over her disappointment.

"I think we shall find Mrs. Fuller here," he said, as the carriage stopped before Jotham Bagg's old home.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Lydia.

"Yes; I believe she meant to stay and give you a welcome."

"She is very kind, I am sure," replied Miss Bagg, hoping her true sentiments had not been expressed in that first unguarded exclamation.

During the week she spent in New York the pretty young widow had been constantly at her elbow. Without her it would have been impossible for Lydia to accomplish what she did and accom-

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plish it so well; but she had not been able to rid herself of a sense of constraint and lack of ease in the experienced young woman's society. The latter gave her a sense of being goaded and pressed on to unaccustomed action which was confusing and fatiguing. It did not occur to Miss Bagg to blame Ida for this. She had no doubt that she herself was stupid and at fault, but she felt intuitively the need of being at her freshest and best in order to meet Mrs. Fuller. To-night she would have been glad to enter a dimly lighted house and creep quietly to bed. That was not to be. No —, Fifth Avenue, was, they found, ablaze with light from roof to cellar. As Miss Bagg descended from the carriage the hall door was thrown open. Mrs. Fuller, becomingly dressed in some soft, light costume, appeared in the doorway, and when Lydia had ascended the steps she seized her hands and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Welcome home," she said pleasantly. "I could n't endure the thought that there would be no one here to greet you, so I excused myself from a dinner."

"You are very kind," replied Miss Bagg, looking and feeling very small in the great hall with its old-fashioned high ceiling. A strange man standing near bewildered her, and she was not soothed when Mrs. Fuller half-turned toward him saying: "Banks, this is your new mistress."

A white-capped, pleasant-looking woman, who had been standing behind the young widow, here

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came forward respectfully and offered to take Miss Bagg's little satchel.

"Yes, Martha," said Mrs. Fuller, "you may take that to Miss Bagg's room. Won't you let Martha take your wrap and your bonnet? Come with me, and supper will be served at once. Banks!"

The man bowed and moved away immediately. "I do not want any supper," replied Miss Bagg. "A cup of tea is all. Nora and I have both had supper."

At this Mrs. Fuller bent a curious glance upon Miss Bagg's companion. Nora's face expressed the most dazed and wide-eyed wonder. Her new hat, bought this morning in Boston, was rakishly askew.

She leaned toward her mistress. "Air we go'ne to stay all night to this hotel, Miss Bagg?" she inquired in a loud whisper.

Lydia smiled. "This is n't a hotel, Nora," she said quietly, "this is home." Upon which the Irish girl's mouth fell open and she stared through the spacious doorway into the depths of the drawing-room, more wonder-smitten than before.

Suddenly her face changed with a look of intelligence and she smiled, showing the set of sound white teeth which for some years now Miss Lydia had kept as clean as her morals.

"I hear the Joodge, mem. Oh, lave me up to see the Joodge!"

"Where is the Judge?" inquired Lydia, turning to Max, who had just come in.

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"I will show you," replied Ida. "I do not believe Max knows. The parrot is in your own sanctum, Cousin Lydia. There! it slipped out. I did not mean to call you that until I had asked your permission; but really, as I have been in and out of dear Cousin Jotham's house the last week, preparing it for your reception, it has been impossible for me to think of you as Miss Bagg." She gave Lydia a winning smile, and slipped her fine white hand through the latter's arm.

"Why, of course, I shall be very happy," murmured Lydia, really pleased.

"Then mind you call me Ida. Don't forget, now. We will have some tea brought upstairs. Martha, you may give the order."

Mrs. Fuller kept her light hold on Miss Bagg's arm as they moved up the staircase, followed by Nora and then Van Kirk, and Ida led her charge into a charming, bright room which, could old Jotham have revisited it, he certainly would not have recognized as belonging to his former *ménage*.

Mrs. Fuller had not put love for the future occupant into the refurnishing of this floor of the great house, but she had put into it a love of spending money *carte blanche*, a love of beautiful, luxurious things, and a large amount of good taste; and the result, while Miss Bagg's inexperience made her incapable of fully appreciating it, was gratifying in the extreme. She stood in the doorway of the charming flower-bestrewn boudoir, with its open fire, in speechless admiration. "What is

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this? What is this?" she said at last. "I saw no such place as this when I was here before."

"Ida has done it all," said Van Kirk, looking with proud admiration at his cousin. "Thank her."

"I do indeed thank you," exclaimed Lydia gratefully. "How very, very kind you have been."

Mrs. Fuller received the simple, heartfelt words with a smiling little bow. "I enjoyed doing it," she replied, with a stricter honesty than she usually found it necessary or convenient to employ in her speech.

Meanwhile Nora had advanced to where between two silk-hung windows a fine golden mansion stood upon a pedestal. The Judge had also evidently come into a fortune. In the brilliant artificial light he was gyrating nimbly, quite as discontented as his mistress had at first been with all this unseasonable parade. He would have vastly preferred the darkness of the parlor at Ashley. What did he care for bowls of "American beauties," silk and velvet furnishings, screens and chiming clocks?

As Nora approached, he looked at her viciously. She well knew the meaning of that swift-varying dilation and contraction of the pupils of his golden eyes.

"Sure ye 're glad to see me, Joodgie," she said coaxingly. "'T was n't me shut ye up in the box."

"Shut up!" quoth the Judge.

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"He 's mad at me ag'in, Miss Bagg," said Nora resignedly. "He thinks 't was me doon it."

Miss Lydia crossed to her pet. "My, my, Judgie! what a beautiful house!" she said.

For answer, the parrot bit his bars vindictively, then struck one of them smartly with his beak. "Come in," he cried, in response to his own summons.

"That is the most amusing thing he does," said Ida, laughing. "The Judge and I have been getting acquainted the last two days." She did not add that the acquaintance, so far as she was concerned, had been the reverse of pleasant. "They told me at Holden's that no finer cage was procurable than that."

"Oh, how kind you have been!" exclaimed Miss Bagg, "you have thought of everything." She slid her toil-worn little hand between the golden bars, a fearless behavior toward the excited bird which astonished all but Nora. The Judge bent his head down and she gently grasped it. He gave his neck a sudden twist and seized her fingers in his beak.

She smiled at him placidly. How wicked his eyes looked!

"Tut, tut, Judge, not too hard," she said quietly, for his pressure all but cut her. He certainly looked as though it would give him satisfaction to close his beak upon her bones.

"Do be careful, Miss Bagg," said Van Kirk, "those fellows can bite through sole leather."

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"Yes, I know they can," replied Lydia simply. "It is very dangerous for anybody to trifle with them who does not love them very much. I love this poor bird. He was such a pet of my father's, and now I think he has transferred all his affection to me. There is n't the least danger."

The restless feathered head was again nestled in her caressing hand. "He is very uneasy," she said at last, as she turned away from the cage. "He does n't like light at this hour."

"No, I have learned that," replied Mrs. Fuller. "I was at work in here last evening, and suddenly he began to make a noise like a pistol shot, or like the cracking of a huge rock, over and over again. I flung a shawl over the cage, and in ten minutes I found he had bitten as many holes in it."

"Dear me! A nice shawl?"

"Oh, it was no matter," said Ida carelessly, "but we must make some arrangement, for you will often want to use this room in the evening, and the Judge's domicile is too heavy to move about. They will help us out at Holden's. I thought there might be some wire adjustment that we could slip on the cage at night, which would hold the cloth out of his reach, then we could have the covering as nice as we liked."

Miss Bagg looked at the speaker admiringly. "How pleasantly you arrange everything," she said. Mrs. Fuller shrewdly perceived that no part of the energy she had put forth would bring her such returns as her care for the Judge.

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"Look in this way," she said, and led Miss Bagg into such a sleeping-room as she would have liked for herself, but among whose numerous luxurious appurtenances Lydia would for a time wander bewildered. The use of one article Miss Bagg knew, and that was the richly clothed bed. She wished she were already reposing between its snowy sheets. Nora entered, expressing her awe and admiration in her own mute and round-eyed manner.

Mrs. Fuller looked at her disapprovingly. "You call this girl Nora, I believe," she said coldly. "Shall I ring for Martha to show her her room?"

"I will look at Nora's room, too, I think," replied Miss Bagg.

"Then I will show it to you myself," replied Mrs. Fuller after a moment of surprised hesitation.

She rung and Martha appeared. "This is a girl Miss Bagg has brought with her. Where are you going to put her for the night?"

The neat woman in white cap and apron looked Nora over from head to foot, quick to take her cue from Mrs. Fuller's careless manner.

"If she is here for one night I can make up a bed on the floor for her in one of those empty rooms, I suppose," she said.

"Is it your intention to keep the girl?" asked Mrs. Fuller of Miss Bagg, whom amazement had rendered mute.

"Keep her? Keep Nora?" she returned.

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There was plenty of spirit in Lydia when it was aroused, and this suggestion roused her mightily. The idea of sending Nora among strangers in this great city set her blood to coursing swiftly.

"Evidently I did not make you understand about Nora," she continued quietly; then she turned toward Martha. "Show me the rooms that are not in use. I need not trouble you to come with us," — again addressing Ida.

"No trouble at all. Let me help you select," replied Mrs. Fuller suavely, inwardly railing at herself for having lost a point.

"Nora, just help me off with this," said Lydia, and, having removed her outside garments, she followed Mrs. Fuller, who dismissed Martha with a word, thereby losing another point with Miss Bagg, whose roused sensitiveness found the proceeding rather high-handed.

"I think Martha had better come with us," she said. "I may need her to help Nora."

Mrs. Fuller swallowed another sensation of astonishment and led the way upstairs.

"Mr. Van Kirk is expecting to occupy the other large room on the same floor with yours. The front and back rooms here are guest chambers, and this little room" — opening one at the head of the stairs, "I thought with the bed moved out Mr. Van Kirk might like for a quiet writing-room."

"This will be the very room for Nora," said Miss Bagg deliberately.

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"I was going to show you the servants' rooms. This room Mr. Van Kirk" —

"Mr. Van Kirk will be supreme in the library," said Miss Bagg, with a firmness that astonished herself. "I shall never disturb him there, but this room I will use for Nora."

Perhaps the rough little hand that was holding her by the sleeve gave the mistress of the mansion courage. At all events, she knew nothing of these city-bred servants, and no dew-spangled shamrock was ever purer and simpler than this young girl she had taught. She was quick to remember, however, that this preference might make Nora unpopular with the other girls. She turned to Martha.

"I need to have Nora near me. I want her here for my convenience. Please show her where she can find bedding and help her to put the room in order for her use."

Then Miss Bagg went downstairs. Her heart was beating pretty fast, but she was confident that she had done right, and glad she had had sufficient firmness to break through Mrs. Fuller's subtle, constraining influence.

The latter was too clever to show mortification or offense. She served tea charmingly in the flowery boudoir to Miss Bagg and her secretary, after which she bade the lady of the house a pleasant farewell and set off for home, escorted by Max, who had kept the carriage waiting for the purpose.

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As soon as they were alone and the horses had started she fell into a silent mood, her explanation of which was that she was tired.

"You have done too much," said Van Kirk tenderly. "It is a great deal to have accomplished in so short a time. Very few women could have done it."

"I like to do it. I should like to go on so to the end of my life, attaining object after object which pleased me, reckless of its cost; to say imperiously, 'That I will have, I will go there, I will do this,' as though no force could oppose itself to my will. That is to live!"

Van Kirk looked moodily out into the darkness. "I always said you were born a queen," he replied.

Ida continued with subdued excitement: "The woman who is on my throne will fill it uneasily. Her level seems to be about that of the freak she has brought with her from the country."

Van Kirk laughed. "It is rather rough on poor Nora to call her a 'freak.' She is a bright enough little girl."

Mrs. Fuller smiled scornfully. "Fancy having such a hobbledehoy about one as a maid. Really, Max, I do not envy you your prospective life in that museum of curiosities."

This was false, for nothing under the present circumstances would have pleased Ida better than to be asked to domesticate herself in Miss Bagg's family. She felt certain of her power ultimately

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to possess herself of the reins and govern matters to suit her own lavish ideas.

Meanwhile Miss Bagg, with a deep sigh of relief, had repaired to her own room, soon, she hoped, to forget all turmoil of thoughts and impressions in sweet slumber.

A gentle knock on her door disturbed her. She opened to Nora.

"Can I do anything to help, mem?"

"No, Nora, not to-night. Have you made your room comfortable?"

"It 's iligant, mem, and the woman ye called Martha, her in the cap, mem, she was very kind and civil. Sure it 's a palace we live in now, mem."

"Yes, Nora. 'Thus far the Lord hath led me on.' Don't forget to say your prayers."

"I won't, mem." Nora's religious observances were of rather a varied character, owing to the habits of her childhood grafted upon by Miss Bagg's orthodox teachings, but her heart was right.

She kissed her mistress' hands, a grateful habit she had always had from the time Lydia took her in, which, dreadfully embarrassing to Miss Bagg at first, now seemed a matter of course.

"Good-night, Nora. Sleep well."

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CHAPTER IX.

MISS CARLYLE'S CONSTITUTIONAL.

BESIDE Mrs. Van Kirk and her niece there was no one who felt more vital an interest in the strange turn taken by events after Jotham Bagg's death than Olive Carlyle and her mother. They were too far out of the current of the Van Kirks' life to know what was going on among them, but they heard the wondrous news of Maxwell's disappointment, and that the property had gone to a nearer relative. Who or what she was they knew not. Motives of delicacy restrained them from returning Mrs. Van Kirk's call and thereby learning all they would have liked to know. They could very well imagine the resentment of Cousin Elinor, and they did not wish to intrude upon her.

Not all of Olive's speculations were expressed in words. Her thoughts were often busy as she sat at her work, recalling the sentiment which she was sure she had discovered existing between Max and Ida. The subject had a fascination for her which was not strange. Ida was an attractive young woman, Max physically an ideal hero. Olive had, except rarely on the stage, never be-

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fore beheld a potentially romantic young couple of their station. No wonder she entertained herself with their probable doings and sayings in the unexpected set of circumstances in which they now found themselves.

No healthy girl can live in New York without having considerable variety in her life, even though her little purse be as empty as Miss Carlyle's. Olive had grown up in wholesome contentment, too busy to lapse often into envy or covetousness, with a devout belief in and passionate love for her indefatigable mother, and up to the evening of Cousin Jotham's dinner-party she had never harbored a doubt which questioned or resented her own obscurity and the uneventfulness of her life. That evening, however, was a turning-point to her. She did not realize it, her mother did not perceive it, but the stream of thought which swept through the pretty head before the easel in the dingy back parlor was turned ever afterward into new channels. New vistas were opened in the realm of the girl's imagination.

Even when she walked abroad, familiar scenes had for her a new aspect. She peopled the houses on the handsome avenues with young, well-dressed people, where most of the men resembled Max Van Kirk and most of the women his cousin Ida. While the freshness of her novel impressions remained, life was no longer humdrum, and her own thoughts were more entertaining than the novelist's art. Mrs. Carlyle was not the woman to

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strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. She did not reach out with all her energies to help the shop-girls and allow her own daughter to read and live as she listed, unobserved. Olive Carlyle's exquisitely innocent and intelligent face was in her case the actual type of an unsullied mind. It was an active mind, and, as has been said, since Cousin Jotham's dinner-party, had been largely given up to the weaving of romances.

One fine afternoon in early January, when the sun had sunk too low to admit of crayon work in the back parlor, Olive started out for a brisk constitutional. Her steps gravitated unconsciously toward the house where she had seen what to her was an alluring glimpse of society, and as she walked, so many charming ideas dawned upon her of what life might be that the pleasant notion occurred to her that she might write a book herself. She did not like Ida Fuller very well, but it would be impossible for one with any artistic perception not to admire her. Her heroine, then, should have Ida Fuller's body and the sweetest soul Olive could imagine. The story should open in Cousin Jotham's house, the desolate home which, to think of, vast and empty, gave her a shudder. At last she was approaching it. There it stood, tall, gray, forbidding. In Olive's book Cousin Jotham should die and leave no will, just as had in fact taken place, only in her closing chapter there should occur the striking novelty of the discovery of the missing document; the desperately unfortunate

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hero should be made happy, and be united forever to the faithful heroine.

The hero — well, he should be a much finer and loftier character than any man Olive knew, but — her firm, long, light steps were drawing very near now to the Bagg mansion, and the sight of it brought vividly back the memory of Max, handsome and confident as he stood that night under the chandelier — yes, the hero of her book could not do better than to look like —

The massive door of the great house opened, and Miss Bagg's secretary ran down the steps. Miss Carlyle started consciously and blushed delightfully. Mr. Van Kirk saw her and came forward, his hat off, to shake her hand.

"You look as much surprised as though you did not know I was in this part of the world," he said, rather piqued by her astonishment, and wondering in the same breath how he could have so completely forgotten such a radiant creature as she was now, even in her worn black jacket and a hat of last winter.

"I did not know whether you were in this part of the world or not. You never condescend to make calls on your relatives, you know, Mr. Van Kirk," was the gay response.

"When have I had opportunity?" returned the ready young man. "Where are you going? for I am going there, too."

"How good of you!" returned Olive, her eyes and lips laughing. For her at that moment it was

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a joy to live. The frosty air, so congenial to her perfect vitality, the clear sky, the smooth pavement under her feet, were all adjuncts to the cordial admiration in Van Kirk's eyes, which gave her the crowning gratification of the moment. "Perhaps, since I am only walking idly, I had better be the one to go where you are going," she added brightly.

"It amounts to the same thing. I am on my way to call on my mother. I wish you would come with me."

"I will, part of the way," said Olive, turning back with him. "How is Cousin Elinor? I have not seen her since — since that night."

"She has been ill. She has not left the house for a long time. I wish — why have n't I thought before to ask it? — I wish your mother would go and see her. I remember when I was a youngster Cousin Mary was a great comforter in time of trouble. I suppose you know the last month or two have been troublous ones for us — more for my mother, perhaps, than for me."

Olive met his look seriously. "Yes, we knew about it vaguely. I was very sorry indeed for your disappointment, Max." The frank words sounded very pleasant in the soft voice. "I was sorrier than mother. She pitied you intensely," added the girl, with a droll light in her eyes, "when she thought you were going to be a millionaire. She was not sure that you were strong enough to bear it."

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"Indeed!" said Max, with an answering smile. "Well, you see I had not to bear it."

"Yes, and that makes mother sure you were not ready for it."

"Well, a comfortable philosophy."

"The only philosophy, she believes, with which one can go through this life other than miserably. Of course I don't know, for I have never had any trouble, — that is, any to speak of." Olive corrected herself, remembering with a warm uprising in her cheeks the day that Cousin Jotham returned the rejected portrait. She believed that on that occasion she had known crushing trouble.

Van Kirk looked at her with interest, conscious, as she easily kept pace with him, that it was a privilege to behold her before trouble had come to dim one detail of her fresh charm.

"How old are you, Olive?" he asked.

"Nineteen next time."

He shook his head. "You are very young, my child."

She gave a spontaneous little laugh. "Well, I like that," she said.

"So do I," he returned promptly, looking at her as though he were sincere.

"What are your plans now? Are you going to stay here?"

"Oh, yes. I have to, you know. I have lost my chance in the army."

"I never heard of anything more provoking," exclaimed Olive warmly.

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"Is that sympathy for my lost commission, or disapproval of my remaining here?"

The girl smiled. "Your remaining here is nothing to me, you know. I shall never see you."

"Why, I think we ought to walk together every day. Do you observe how well we suit one another?"

"I must have a military gait, then."

"Yes. You should have been the daughter of a regiment."

"Is Cousin Jotham's house kept open? I was so surprised to see you emerge from there!"

"Certainly. The heiress is living there. I too. I have undertaken to manage her business affairs for her."

"Indeed?" Miss Carlyle's large eyes looked very wide. Supposing the hero of her tale should prove insubordinate. Might he not fall in love with this new actress in the drama or be mercenary enough to marry her money? "We heard she was a single lady," she said aloud. "How I should like to see her."

"She would like to see you, too. It is a part of my general remissness that I have not called upon you and your mother and asked you to visit her. She is a total stranger here. Ida has been the only one of the clan, as she calls it, to befriend her. My only excuse is great occupation. My mind has been full of other things."

"I dare say. Isn't it rather ironical in fate to place you in the position of assistant to the usurper?"

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"It is certainly the kindest turn fate could do me, under the circumstances."

"Of course, it is the best thing that could happen, or it would n't have taken place. I will say it for mother, as she is n't here. Well, now I must say good-by;" and Olive paused as they reached a corner.

"You must n't say anything of the sort. I told you I was going wherever you were. If you will not come to see my mother, I shall have to go home with you."

"It is too late for me to visit Cousin Elinor to-night. It will be quite dark in half an hour." They moved on together down the cross street, going farther and farther away from the haunts of the characters in Miss Carlyle's incipient novel.

A face, leaning forward in a close carriage, attracted their attention. Max had barely time to remove his hat after recognizing it before the perfectly appointed equipage passed.

"That was Ida, was n't it?" asked Olive.

"Yes, and I suppose Miss Bagg was with her. Did you notice what a neat little brougham that was? Ida selected it for Miss Bagg."

"Why, is her name Bagg?"

"Yes, she is Uncle Jotham's brother's daughter."

"What is she like?"

"I refuse to gratify your curiosity, because I want you to visit her."

When they drew near the brick house, the centre of a block, which was Olive's home, Van Kirk looked about him curiously.

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"It must be a good many years since I was here," he observed.

"A nice record. Are n't you ashamed to admit it?" asked the girl, a picture of glowing beauty in the biting air as she set her foot on the lowest of the flight of steps and turned.

"You know it is not my fault but my misfortune."

"Well, you are coming in now?"

"I cannot. I have not seen my mother for a couple of days, and she is very low-spirited."

"You had better come in. We will give you some tea and bread and butter, which will not interfere with your dinner in the least. Of course we should be charmed to have you spend the evening," added the girl, her eyes sparkling. "It is our reception night."

"Oh, have you an evening?" asked Van Kirk seriously.

"Certainly. You did not suppose we lived in New York and had no 'evening'?"

"I did n't know," returned the young man, very much in the dark as to her meaning.

The house door opened and Mrs. Carlyle appeared.

"I thought it was you, Max," she said. "I caught a glimpse of you from the window. You are coming in?"

Van Kirk ran up the steps, took her hand, and led her inside.

"Only while I speak to you a moment. I am

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on my way to see my mother, and, meeting Olive, I walked home with her."

"Well, dear boy," — Mrs. Carlyle, still holding his hand, looked into his face scrutinizingly with her soft eyes, — "I have n't seen you before to congratulate you."

"To congratulate me! Well, I have been receiving very few congratulations of late."

"You have mine, heartily given, Max. It did not devolve upon you, with your youth and inexperience, to be steward of all that wealth. You are gently allowed to do easier work than that."

Van Kirk stared. His mother, Ida, the world, had been ringing other changes in his ears.

"There," said Olive, who had followed them into the house, "you see some people think *you* are very young. Take it humbly, Max."

"I wish you could stay," continued Mrs. Carlyle, dropping his hand, "but to-night our girls come. We could not have an undisturbed visit."

"Olive said this was your reception evening," replied the young man tentatively.

"Yes, there are a lot of young girls without many other friends who come here on Wednesdays. Come and see us some evening, if you ever have leisure. I am much interested to know what you decide to do, Max. You have been put in a hard place; yet it is easier than the other would have been. How does the mother bear it?"

"Not very well. Go and see her if you can, Cousin Mary, but do not tell her that I am to be

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congratulated." Van Kirk shook his head with a significant smile.

Mrs. Carlyle nodded. "I only wanted to know that she would like to see me."

"She is not well pleased with what I have decided to do, which is to be general utility man to Uncle Jotham's heiress; but I consider myself in great luck."

"Well, I like to hear you say that."

"I have been telling Olive that I hope you will both call on Miss Bagg. She is a little strange yet to her environment. Now I must be off. Good-by, Olive." He stretched out his hand and she gave him hers. "I hope we may soon meet again, if you take daily constitutionals. Good-by, Cousin Mary."

He departed, and Mrs. Carlyle gazed at her daughter with a pensive look which seemed to see beyond her.

"I declare I am surprised," she said at last. "That is not the kind of son I expected Elinor Van Kirk to have. That is a remarkable young man, Olive. He has sustained a heavy blow without being crushed. I am so happy, for his mother's sake, that he should prove himself a hero. Poor Elinor! This may turn her eyes in a better direction again."

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CHAPTER X.

MRS. CARLYLE MAKES A FRIEND.

MRS. CARLYLE determined to call upon Mrs. Van Kirk the following day, and as she had some purchases to make in the way of winter clothing, she decided, Mrs. Van Kirk's boarding-place being rather remote, not to go home between the two errands, but to take her noon meal in the lunch-room of the large dry-goods establishment where she found herself at that hour. The place had not become crowded, and she seated herself at a little empty table and ordered the rolls and coffee which always composed her luncheon when she indulged in the unwonted extravagance of eating it outside her own house.

Women and children flocked into the place. Before Mrs. Carlyle's coffee arrived nearly every table was full. The clatter of moving chairs and clashing crockery became every moment more disagreeable. At last there remained only the empty place opposite Mrs. Carlyle. A slender woman, dressed in black cloth and fur, entered the room and came forward anxiously, and yet with some hesitation. She looked rather timidly at Mrs. Carlyle, and it was not among the possibilities for

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that lady to receive such a look without returning an answering smile.

She half-inclined her head, and the new-comer sat down in the vacant place, taking a second look at her vis-à-vis. She observed the gray shawl with its black border and the black felt bonnet which Mrs. Carlyle wore, and Mrs. Carlyle also took note of her neighbor's garb. Its richness was the only obstacle which deterred her from continuing by words the reassurance which the smile had given.

At this moment the waitress brought her coffee and rolls. The stranger looked at the cup.

"I believe *I* will have some coffee," she said to the girl, and again she sent Mrs. Carlyle that unconsciously questioning and timid glance which set the latter's ever-ready loving-kindness to overflowing.

"The coffee is very good here," she remarked. "Would you like to see the card?"

The stranger thanked her as she accepted it, and shook her head as she ran her eyes over the contents.

"What terrible prices," she remarked, and again her eyes sought Mrs. Carlyle's.

"The old story," thought the latter. "The more money, the greater reluctance to spend it."

Her neighbor gave her order, and began taking off her gloves. Her hands when revealed puzzled Mrs. Carlyle more than what had gone before. They looked like hard-working hands, and the fingers had evidently been needle-pricked for years.

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"Ah, probably a well-to-do dressmaker, who prefers to invest her property in adornment for her own person," decided Mrs. Carlyle. It was an explanation of the fact of finding such luxurious garments in this unfashionable resort of a busy middle class.

The stranger's next remark confirmed her in this belief.

"This is the first meal I ever took in a New York restaurant," she said.

"You are from out of town, then."

"Yes. I come from a place in Massachusetts, only half a day's ride from Boston. Have you ever been in that part of the country?" added the stranger, so wistfully that Mrs. Carlyle took pleasure in replying: —

"Oh, yes. I am a Massachusetts woman myself."

"I am so glad I spoke, then. I have longed so to see somebody from Massachusetts. It has seemed to me that it would do me so much good to talk with a woman from there. I have the feeling" — the speaker leaned confidingly toward her neighbor — "that nobody in New York cares for my *soul*."

Mrs. Carlyle's eyes and lips gained their sweetest expression. "Then I presume you will not remain long in a place which impresses you with a desolate feeling. I know very well what you mean."

"Yes," replied the other, with a sad accent, "I have made up my mind to stay the winter here."

The waitress brought the stranger's luncheon.

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She had ordered rather a generous meal, despite the disconcerting prices.

"My husband was a Boston man," said Mrs. Carlyle. "We lived there until eighteen years ago; then he changed his business and came to New York. Mr. Carlyle never liked this great city any more than you do."

"Carlyle?" repeated the other. "Carlyle, living in Boston?"

"Yes; perhaps you know some of them." Mrs. Carlyle looked up with interest. Always living her doctrine that every spot of God's earth should seem like home, and all His children akin one to another, she had a love for discovering community of interests with all whom she met.

Her vis-à-vis looked at her reflectively, her heavy cup raised half-way to her lips. "One of the Carlyles married a Bagg," she remarked.

"Yes, indeed." The gray eyes were beamingly benevolent behind the steel-bowed spectacles. "My husband's mother was a Bagg. Do you know any of the Baggs?"

The heavy cup was set down untouched. "I *am* a Bagg," cried the little woman eagerly. "Now, I want to know!"

It was hard to tell which of the faces gazing at one another across the table expressed the more pleasure.

"Then I dare say we shall discover a family connection," returned Mrs. Carlyle. "My husband's mother was cousin to Mr. Jotham Bagg, so

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well known in this city. He was your relative, too, perhaps."

"My uncle," exclaimed Lydia, much gratified.

"Then you" — began Mrs. Carlyle, and stopped. The truth suddenly dawned upon her. Her head fell a little to one side and she studied her opposite neighbor, still smiling, but with a new interest in the latter's timidity and homesick sensations of strangeness. "You are Cousin Jotham's heiress," she said, after the pause.

"Yes," replied the other, looking excited and glad, "and you are one of the connections and you 're from Boston. Why has n't somebody told me about you? I thought Mrs. Fuller and Mrs. Van Kirk were all there were."

"Max was at our house a minute yesterday," said Mrs. Carlyle, "and he asked my daughter and me to come to see you. He apologized for not having done so before, saying he had been too busy to remember it."

"Well, to think I was led right into this restaurant and up to this very table! Do have lunch with me; do! I can never eat all this," continued Miss Bagg, feeling more content and happy than at any time since that fateful morning in Ashley when Mr. Galbraith's letter arrived. The look in Mrs. Carlyle's face and the tones of her voice, the very plainness of her attire, had sunk into Lydia's heart as gratefully as refreshing rain into the parched earth. She felt vivified throughout, and enriched by her discovery. She called for a fork

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for her new friend, and was made happy by Mrs. Carlyle's acceptance of some of her dishes.

"I am so glad I ran away!" she said naively.

"Did you run away?" asked Mrs. Carlyle.

Lydia blushed at her own admission. "I have not been around alone to any of the stores before," she answered. "Mrs. Fuller usually goes with me. This morning I thought I would like to see how it seemed not to ride in the carriage, but to go on the elevated railway, so I put on my things and came down-town without saying anything to anybody. When I found it was noon, it occurred to me that it would be a change to come in here and eat my lunch, although I felt quite sure Mrs. Fuller would not approve of it. She does not like to come into this store. It is too crowded with what she calls common people. Perhaps you know Mrs. Fuller?"

"Yes, indeed. I have known her from a child; not seeing her very often, however. She is an interesting woman."

"Yes, and knows so much of what one should do and should not do in my position," answered Miss Bagg, with a little unconscious sigh. "That is what I meant by running away. I felt quite sure Cousin Ida would not like me to ride on the elevated road. Perhaps she might not object, but I thought I would come out early, by myself, before she arrived. She is very kind. She always gives me her advice in the kindest way," added Miss Bagg hastily.

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"Ah! She comes every day, does she?"

"Usually. There is almost always something that I need to be told about, — she thinks there is. She is very kind."

"How do you find Mrs. Van Kirk?"

"Oh, she has been sick ever since I came," replied Lydia. "I have n't seen her at all. Cousin Ida brings me kind messages from her quite often. I shall be glad to know her for her son's sake."

"You like him?"

The care-worn little lines that had been deepening in Miss Bagg's forehead, as she talked, smoothed, and a cordial light brightened her eyes. "I know you won't misunderstand me, Mrs. Carlyle, if I say to you that I love that young man," she said emphatically. "I love him. I 'm old enough to be his mother, and I only wish he were my son. He has been everything to me that a son could be from the time all this excitement and change began. Always so thoughtful, always so kind, in little and great things alike."

Mrs. Carlyle's face wore an answering glow of pleasure and interest. "That is fine — fine to hear," she replied. "Good for Max. He is a noble man. I should not have expected it."

"You would n't?" asked Lydia in surprise. "Then I suppose you do not know him well."

"No, not very well of late years, of course, for he had been away all the time; still, I meant I should not expect it of any young man under circumstances of such great disappointment. Few

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would be generous enough to keep in mind your entire innocence."

Miss Bagg stared at the speaker blankly. "What disappointment?" she asked, after a moment. "Oh, do you mean about the money? No, no. It was not Mr. Van Kirk; it was another man, — a dreadful man;" she shuddered. "His name is Wilkins, and he has gone to Europe, Mr. Van Kirk tells me, or I should not have an easy day."

"Yes, I dare say he was disappointed, too. He had believed in his own claims, but no one agreed with him. Why, is it possible you know nothing about it?" Mrs. Carlyle again dropped her head to one side, and regarded Lydia benignantly. If the good lady had a weakness, it was the difficulty she experienced in realizing that facts ever should be kept secret. Many women of far less unselfish habit of mind would have understood now that, if the heiress had been kept in ignorance of the story of Cousin Jotham's protégé, it had probably been of intention; but Mrs. Carlyle thought only of raising Max higher still in Miss Bagg's regard.

"No, indeed," returned Lydia earnestly. "No one has told me anything about Mr. Van Kirk's having a disappointment."

"Well, he had one, I assure you, and you will see that he merits the warm regard you feel for him." Then Mrs. Carlyle began at the beginning and told Max's story.

"I want to know!" ejaculated Lydia, when

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the tale was finished. She frowned and looked thoughtful. "I wonder if that is what made his mother ill?"

"I think it likely," said Mrs. Carlyle. "I am glad to hear that she sends you kind messages. It shows that she is coming to take a right view of the case."

"I suppose that is because Mr. Van Kirk gets a large salary for managing things for me," said Lydia, brightening. "He is to have six thousand dollars a year. Of course he could never spend all that."

"It is a good salary," replied Mrs. Carlyle. "He could marry on it."

"Oh, that will be the next thing," exclaimed Miss Bagg dismally. "I shall dread to have him get married. Do you know," — she leaned across the table confidentially, — "he admires his cousin Ida very, very much? I 'm sure of it."

"Seriously enough for marriage, do you think?"

"Seriously enough for anything. I don't know — somehow or other, it does n't seem to me quite the thing. I 'm not partial to cousins marrying, and I may be mistaken, but she seems older than he is."

"She is, a little; not much."

Having finished their luncheon, the two friends rose from the table.

"I must go home, or they will think that I am lost," said Lydia. "You will come to see me soon, won't you?" She gave Mrs. Carlyle's hand

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a warm clasp. "I am so glad I found you," she added earnestly.

Her companion returned a cordial answer, promising to visit her soon; then they parted.

Arrived at Mrs. Van Kirk's boarding-place, Mrs. Carlyle found a welcome awaiting her.

"Maxwell encouraged me to hope you would come to-day," said the semi-invalid, whose face still bore the imprint of martyrdom. "Why have n't you been here before?"

"Simply because I was not sure you wished to see visitors," replied Mrs. Carlyle, taking the offered chair in Mrs. Van Kirk's pleasant bay-window.

"Not visitors, of course, Mary. I had no heart for that, but it was cruel in you to stay away at such a time. What we have passed through!" The speaker pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"And how beautifully you have come out of it all!" was the cheery reply. "I just happened to meet Miss Bagg in the oddest way, and we struck up an acquaintance. It would do your heart good to hear the way she speaks of Max."

"Yes," returned Mrs. Van Kirk, in a hollow tone. "After robbing him of his patrimony, she has robbed me of my boy. He lives in her house. He is too busy with her affairs to give his mother more than hurried calls. There never was a woman who was called upon to make such sacrifices as I have always made," continued Mrs. Van Kirk, nearly in tears. "When he was a child,

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Max had ever to be subject to Uncle Jotham's beck and call. When he was a youth, it was demanded of me to give him to the government. After that academy swallowed him up, I had no more right to see him or to control his movements than if I had been an utter stranger; then he went into the army, and now look at the situation. He disregards my advice, and toils early and late to further the prosperity of one whose wealth is already a burden."

"Yet you try to feel kindly toward her," replied Mrs. Carlyle cheerfully. "She told me herself of the pleasant messages she receives from you."

"Pleasant messages!" Mrs. Van Kirk dropped her hands and stared at her visitor. At this moment Mrs. Fuller entered the room, her soft house-dress trailing over the carpet behind her and clinging close to her lithe figure. "Ida Fuller, have you been concocting messages and carrying them from me to that woman?" she exclaimed, turning to face her niece.

The young widow advanced to the visitor and presented her cheek to be kissed. "Cousin Mary, have you been telling tales out of school?" she asked calmly.

"No, my child, it is not possible. What do you mean, Elinor?"

"I mean that I never sent a message to that woman. I would scorn to do it. How did you dare, Ida!"

The young woman laughed, and took a low seat,

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where, with her soft dress in folds about her feet, she made a graceful picture as she leaned against the casement.

"It did not take much daring," she replied. "I knew you would thank me later."

"Never. If you and Max choose to make slaves and spectacles of yourselves I do not, and never shall."

"You need not be spectacular or slavish, but you will surely call upon her soon," said Ida.

"I will not," — shortly. "I could not, without expressing to her my righteous indignation at what my precious boy has suffered, and Max is determined she shall never know. He has laid most imperative orders — requests, he would call them — upon Ida and me," finished Mrs. Van Kirk, looking aggrievedly at her visitor.

"Then I have made a mistake, and I hope Max will forgive me," said Mrs. Carlyle promptly, "for I told her all about it this morning."

Instantly Ida changed her relaxed posture and leaned forward with a concentrated gaze. "What did she say? How did she take it?" she asked with sudden eagerness.

"She was a good deal impressed with the narrative, I think. It made her appreciate more than ever the nobility and kindness Max has shown her; but I think she feels that the arrangement they have made must be a satisfactory one to him. She thinks he receives a very large salary."

"A very large salary!" Mrs. Van Kirk and Ida

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repeated the phrase in a union of scornful emphasis. Then Mrs. Fuller laughed, and leaned back again in an easy position against the casement.

"That is it," said Mrs. Van Kirk triumphantly. "There you see the mean and sordid spirit which one must expect in a woman of such antecedents."

"Oh, I assure you you are mistaken in that judgment of her," answered Mrs. Carlyle, with pained earnestness.

"Let me suggest something," said Ida in her low, slow tones. "Let us three agree not to tell Max of this. It will annoy him."

"Indeed, I want to tell him," said his mother excitedly. "He will forgive his Cousin Mary easily enough, and I want him to know his employer for what she is."

"Let me persuade you, Aunt Elinor," urged Ida, "at least for the present. Max will only defend Miss Bagg if we assail her, and I should think, proud as you are, you would respect your son's pride, and not place him in the position he will hold after he knows this. You are just the one to realize how the knowledge would trammel him."

Mrs. Van Kirk wavered.

"Miss Bagg is a modest, timid little woman," put in Mrs. Carlyle earnestly. "I do wish, Elinor, you would consent to make her acquaintance. She is homesick in a strange land. It would touch you, Ida, to hear her expression of gratitude for your kindness. It is a temptation, I know, dear, for you to desire to give her pleasure, but don't, don't tell her untruths, for your own sake."

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Mrs. Fuller smiled. "Not even those innocent little white lies?" she said.

"Ah, my child, white lies cast a black shadow on the soul, and, believe me, it is even better that the truth should be spoken at all times than that anything else should ever be spoken."

The gaze of the loving eyes behind the spectacles brought a flush to Ida's cheeks, although she smiled on.

"Well, promise me you won't tell Max of your disclosures," she persisted.

"I will try not to speak of it," said Mrs. Carlyle. "Dear boy, I should be loath to add to his burdens. I suppose, though, that Miss Bagg will tell him."

"I imagine she will not," returned Ida. "She seems to have spasms of shyness. I fancy that is a thing she will not speak of."

"Shyness!" repeated Mrs. Van Kirk, with immense scorn. "Say she will be ashamed to speak of it. I dare say she will be."

Mrs. Carlyle looked into the excited face. "Poor Elinor. I do feel sorry for you," she said, with such a sincere ring in her tone that her hostess' handkerchief was again brought into requisition.

"Not because Max lost the money, but because you are allowing the fact to embitter your life."

Mrs. Van Kirk looked up at the speaker in some surprise. "It is very well for you to talk that way, Mary. I know that your disposition is so entirely different from mine it is impossible for you to enter into my feelings."

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"Oh, I have seen many times in my life when it has been very hard for me to content myself, but I could generally succeed at last simply by counting my blessings. You try it, Elinor, when next you are alone. You will find it occupy you grandly."

Mrs. Van Kirk wiped her eyes. Real tears had sprung in them.

"In the old days," continued Mrs. Carlyle gently, "when our hearts were fresher than they are now, we used to talk sometimes of these things together. Do you remember, dear? There can be no peace for any of us until we admit that a Divine Providence guides our affairs; and after we have admitted that, nothing seems hard after we have been given time to stop and think. All we wish to do, then, is to find out what the Lord wants us to do, and to do it. Life becomes something like the children's game of Magic Music. We are to use all our faculties and to work as intelligently as we can in the affairs of daily life, and we come to feel the gentle guidance which indicates in our failures and successes that one thing is right for us to do or to possess and another wrong. The thing that is hardest to learn is that we are to be as thankful for the failures as for the successes; but that will come at last, and when it does come, happiness is gained indeed."

A silence followed which would have been awkward for a person more self-centred than Mrs. Carlyle; but one could not look into her face without seeing that her thoughts were entirely and lovingly bent upon the woman she was addressing.

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"I would give a great deal to be as steadily content as you are, certainly," said Mrs. Van Kirk at last, lifting her face, but speaking woefully.

"You need to take a longer view, Elinor. Your gaze stops too soon. This world is not all of life. You are right in thinking that I do not deserve credit; I think I was born under a hopeful star, for whichever way I turn my kaleidoscope there is always something that shines out with promise for the next time. I love to rest in the thought that 'a hand divine shall lead them on,' and to think that if one will, he can gather compensations dearer than gold from experiences the Father allows."

The speaker looked into Mrs. Van Kirk's eyes, which had grown rather sullen, then at Ida, who was still leaning against the casement and regarding Mrs. Carlyle with a faint smile which, had the latter been sensitive to ridicule, would have been disconcerting. The visitor felt no tinge of embarrassment. She had said what it occurred to her to say to this woman who it seemed to her was seeking satisfaction in such mistaken ways, and that was all she could do at present.

"I must be going now," she said, rising after the moment of silence. The others rose too.

"Thank you for your visit, Mary," said Mrs. Van Kirk. "Come and see me when you can, for the sake of old times, even if we do not look at things just alike."

"Whenever you want me, dear," returned Mrs. Carlyle, taking her hand, "and don't stay any

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longer in this room. Go out-of-doors. Come to see me. And, Elinor, it is old-fashioned advice, I know, but believe me, it is a very steadying thing to read your Bible. Try it. Read it until you love it. 'Great peace have they who love Thy law,' and peace is what you want. 'Nothing shall offend them,' — think of that!"

Mrs. Van Kirk returned the pressure of her hand faintly.

Mrs. Carlyle said good-by to Ida and departed.

"To think that that unhappy woman lives in a land that flows with milk and honey, if she only knew how to make it flow," she reflected, as she hurried along the street.

Mrs. Fuller, when the caller had gone, looked at her aunt and smiled. "Don't you feel as though we had received a visit from the Salvation Army?" she asked. "Really, Cousin Mary grows worse and worse."

"If we were no worse than she is we should do well," returned Mrs. Van Kirk shortly. "With her ideas she certainly has the best of it here, and if there is any world to come she will have the best of it there; but one thing I want you to understand, Ida. I will not be misrepresented by you any longer to that woman. I will go to her and say all that is in my mind as to her inheritance, unless you promise me."

Ida shrugged her shoulders, and cast a glance toward the ceiling. "Oh, poor Miss Bagg! I promise."

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CHAPTER XI.

A BROKEN IDOL.

As a rule, Miss Bagg had finished breakfast before her secretary was ready for his, but on the morning after her meeting with Mrs. Carlyle she waited for him to come down before she seated herself at the table. He had not dined at home the night before, and she had had no opportunity to tell him of the new acquaintance which gave her so much pleasure.

Max, seeing that she had waited for him, laid aside the morning paper, which was his usual breakfast companion, and gave his whole attention to the narrative which Lydia, with unusual spirit, related to him.

When she had finished, he nodded. "That is as it should be," he said, "and it is all my fault that you have not met her before this. Cousin Mary is one of the salt of the earth, and her daughter Olive is" — he stopped and smiled thoughtfully a moment — "well, Olive is a surprise."

"An unpleasant child, do you mean? It is n't possible with that mother! I made up my mind about that woman in the space of five minutes."

"Not at all. Olive is a young lady and a charm-

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ing one. The surprise is in the way these children grow up. Olive Carlyle is a beauty, and does n't seem to be oppressed by the fact;" and Van Kirk smiled again at his own thoughts.

Miss Bagg was watching him, many new considerations in her mind. She had lain awake hours of the night thinking over what Mrs. Carlyle had told her, and wishing she might in some degree make up to her favorite his loss.

"Mrs. Carlyle thinks a great deal of you," she said at last.

"Does she? All the better for me. It proves her forgiving spirit, though. I used to go to her house from school to my lunches when I was a small boy, as it was nearer than my own home, and I know I made life a burden to her."

"She says you could marry on your salary," remarked Lydia irrelevantly, and Van Kirk, looking up in surprise, saw that his companion had forgotten her breakfast and was gazing at him pensively. Her face changed as she saw his expression.

"I suppose it was n't just the thing for me to tell her how much you have," continued Miss Bagg, in hasty apology. She began beating the table gently with her unused fork, the fine lace around her wrist trembling. Lydia's breakfast costume had changed since the days when the faded brown calico used to rub in neighborly fashion against the Judge's battered old cage in the dining-room at Ashley. "Perhaps I ought not to have spoken of it at all," she went on, "but we fell into confidential talk, and it came about naturally."

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"No matter," replied Max, returning to his breakfast. "It is of no consequence if Cousin Mary knows. Of course, I feel a man's ordinary distaste for having my affairs ventilated."

"Well, I want to talk to you a little about your salary. Is it large enough?" asked Lydia, very full of her own train of thought.

"Certainly. We discussed that, you know."

"No, I never discussed it. I simply assented," replied Miss Bagg. "It sounds large to me, but I know very little of the cost of living here. I was thinking about it in the night, and I have so much more than you."

Van Kirk laughed. "Of course you have, else you could not afford to pay me."

"But, my dear sir," — when Lydia was sufficiently excited to have a little color in her cheeks, and for her knot of curls to quiver, she sometimes addressed her secretary as "my dear sir," — "I have my reasons for wanting to understand very clearly about this. Let us not have any false modesty on either side. You have had some experience in your new duties since the amount was settled upon. Do you still think it enough?"

"I do, Miss Bagg," replied the young man, with that half-deferential, half-protective air which he had always employed toward her, and which, without analyzing, Lydia felt to be one of the most valuable of her new possessions. "I believe you can employ many a man better qualified than I for the work at the same price."

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Miss Lydia aimed a gesture at him with the fork. "Can — you — marry on it?" she asked impressively.

"Are you in a hurry to be rid of me?"

"Don't evade, Mr. Van Kirk. Answer me truthfully."

"Women do marry men who have no more than six thousand a year. I dare say I can compass it."

"But perhaps you have your eye on a woman who would require more. Do not be offended with me, Mr. Van Kirk; you know idle curiosity would never tempt me to talk to you like this."

Max met her earnest gaze. What a frail little creature she was to be able to wield such power. With a stroke of her pen she could make him master of that which would give him his heart's desire. It was a humiliating thought that the woman he loved could be won only with money. It was a fact which he did not yet credit. He flung the idea from him while he returned Miss Bagg's look.

"Then she must wait until I can earn more," he replied. "Thank you sincerely for your interest in me, but now that you know that I believe myself well paid, you may set your mind at rest."

But it was not so easy to set Miss Bagg's mind at rest. Long after Van Kirk had gone into the library, where he always did some work before going to his down-town office, she wandered about the great house like an uneasy spirit. The old

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piano was still in the drawing-room, and Lydia often entertained herself by sitting before it and playing over some of the hymn-tunes she had learned on the melodeon at home; but this morning music had no charms to soothe her. She left the piano with a sigh and went up to her own cheerful sitting-room, where Nora had just finished house-cleaning the Judge's cage. This operation was never accomplished without a wordy war, and as Miss Bagg approached she heard Nora sneezing and the Judge mocking her with exaggerated emphasis.

"All right fer you, Joodgie," Nora exclaimed, much aggrieved. "Ye might have a cold yersilf one o' these days!"

"Nora," said Miss Lydia, entering, "I think Mrs. Fuller will be here this morning, as I did not see her yesterday. When she arrives I want her to be shown up here."

"Is annything wrong, mem?" asked the girl, for her mistress' nervousness was visible to her loving eyes.

"No, I think not; but I need to see Mrs. Fuller on some business before I can settle down to real comfort again."

Nora shook her neatly brushed head. "She 'd niver be no comfort to me, mem," she remarked sententiously, as she proceeded carefully to dust the ornaments of a cabinet.

"Tut, tut, tut, Nora," returned Lydia mechanically.

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"But Mr. Van Kirruk, mem, he thinks his very eyes of her, don't he, mem?"

"I really believe he does," returned Miss Bagg thoughtfully, standing by a window and looking down into the street.

Nora advanced on tiptoe, very neat in her gingham dress and white apron.

"I seen him kiss her hand once," she declared in a loud whisper, and as Miss Bagg gave a startled look into the round eyes the girl nodded her head energetically.

"You should n't have seen it, Nora."

"I could n't help it, mem. They was by the door, and I was jest ferninst on the stairs."

"You might have been mistaken."

"It was no mistake at all, mem." Nora shook her head emphatically. "If it had been bitin' her he was, she would n't 'a' looked near so pleased. It 's lots less than bitin' 'll make her eyes snap." The girl looked about cautiously. "Sure they 'll be gittin' married some day, mem," she finished in a lowered voice.

"Well," said Miss Bagg, "that will be all right."

"Will she come here to live with us, mem?" asked Nora apprehensively.

"Oh, no, I think not," replied Miss Lydia hastily.

"I 'm glad o' that, thin, mem, though it 'll be lonesome without Mr. Van Kirruk."

At this juncture Lydia gave a little start, for

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she caught sight from the window of the figure she was awaiting.

"There comes Mrs. Fuller now," she said. "Go down, Nora, and ask her to walk up here, and see that we are not disturbed for a little while."

Shortly afterward Ida entered the room, graceful, gracious, smiling. "Good-morning. I found you had flown when I called yesterday," she said, coming forward breezily to kiss Miss Bagg.

"Yes, I had a fancy to see if I could find my way about a little, alone, and I succeeded so well that I discovered a new friend, — a connection of the family, too, — a Mrs. Carlyle."

"Oh, yes. Mrs. Carlyle is an old acquaintance of mine."

"So she said. Lay off your coat and bonnet, Cousin Ida; I want to see you particularly this morning, for I must talk to you about something she told me."

Mrs. Fuller obeyed with inward exultation. She had little doubt as to what was weighing on Miss Bagg's mind, and considered it a most favorable sign that she should incline to choose herself for a confidante.

Miss Bagg closed the door, and they sat down before the open fire, where the crackling of fragrant logs added the crowning charm to the cheerfulness of the room.

"Mrs. Carlyle told me the story of Mr. Van Kirk's career," began Miss Bagg.

"Yes?" responded Ida, throwing into the monosyllable much plaintiveness.

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"It was a total surprise to me."

"Oh, believe me, we always knew it," replied the widow, with touching earnestness. "Even Maxwell's mother knew it. We knew you never dreamed of the misery you unwittingly caused."

"Misery?" exclaimed Lydia faintly.

"Why, of course, it could not be otherwise. Knowing, as you do now, the whole story, you can conceive of Maxwell's humiliation before all his acquaintances, his commission gone, his hopes dashed, his future a blank, himself the butt of general ridicule, — ah, poor Max! What he suffered! So young, so proud, so hopeful!"

She clasped her hands, sank back in her chair, and with drawn forehead gazed at the leaping flame, apparently unconscious of Lydia's nervously interlaced fingers and quivering curls.

"Poor young man," exclaimed Miss Bagg, in heartfelt tones; "how nobly he has behaved!"

"Ah, you may well say so," murmured Ida.

"His mother, too," went on Lydia feelingly. "Worthy mother of such a son, to send me kind messages under the circumstances."

"Cousin Lydia, forgive me." Ida sat up and turned her palms out in a pretty gesture of candid appeal. "I have deceived you, though with the best motives. Aunt Elinor has been too crushed, too unnerved, to send you messages. Max was so desirous you should not be troubled, that all heartburnings should be kept from you, that I aided him in keeping up appearances. Of my own trials

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in this matter I say nothing. The heart knoweth its own bitterness." Ida rolled up her eyes, closed them, and leaned back again in her chair, leaving Miss Bagg in a more chaotic and wretched state of mind than ever. No criminal could feel more confounded and guilty than she did now.

"But I protest against all this," she said at last, brokenly. "I wish to make things right. No one can prevent me, I presume, from giving away my own."

Ida did not unclose her eyes at once. She was too stunned with delight at this sudden climax of her hopes to trust herself.

"What do you mean?" she said finally, while her heart thumped in her breast.

"Why, what do I want with more money than I can possibly use?" cried Lydia, rising and beginning to walk to and fro. "I do not want it. I have n't the judgment to use it. Uncle Jotham loved dear Mr. Van Kirk and cared nothing for me. Now that I know how his plans went astray, it is the plainest of plain duties for me to set things straight. Why was this kept from me?"

"Max" — began Mrs. Fuller, almost too faint with joy to speak.

"Yes, I know his high honor and generous heart, but he might have given me credit for some honor too. Let me go to him. He has not left the house yet."

Ida rose, and grasped the excited woman's arm. "Let me go first. Let me go first," she exclaimed

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breathlessly. "You come in a few minutes. Bless you, Miss Bagg, for your noble generosity!" She fled from the room and down the stairs, pausing outside the library to still the beating of her heart and regain her self-control. At last she turned the handle of the door and went in. Max was seated at the desk with his back to her.

"I want to see you a minute, Miss Bagg," he said, without turning his head.

Ida floated across the room and laid her hands lightly across his eyes. The delicious, elusive perfume he associated with her struck his senses. With a start he seized her hands and, still holding them, swung about in his chair and gazed eagerly up into her radiant face. She had never been so happy and she had never looked so handsome in her life.

"Ida!" was all he could say, and he kissed the hands, first one and then the other, while she still regarded him with the triumphant smile in her eyes, and did not as usual withdraw herself.

"What is it that makes you look so radiant?" he asked rapturously, bewildered by her novel manner.

"I have been listening to praise of you," she answered slowly.

He rose and took her in his arms. "Then you do love me, Ida? You have tested yourself and me long enough. You do love me?" he exclaimed in a low voice.

She yielded passively to his embrace, and looked

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up into his shining eyes. "It is Cousin Lydia who has been sounding your praises," she said softly.

"I care not who it was, so they found an echo in your heart, my darling."

"She knows all your story. Cousin Mary Carlyle told her yesterday."

"Yes?" The young man's thoughts flashed to the breakfast-table conversation, and he vaguely understood why Miss Lydia had talked in such a novel fashion; but he had little interest in that now.

"You do love me, Ida?" he repeated; "you will be my wife?"

"Yes," she answered softly, and he pressed his lips to hers.

It was at this moment that Miss Bagg, considering that she had waited quite long enough, suddenly opened the door. At the tableau she beheld, she uttered an irrepressible little squeak and started back, crimsoning to the roots of her hair.

"Come right in, Miss Bagg," said Van Kirk radiantly. "Congratulate me. Mrs. Fuller has consented to be my wife."

"I am not one bit surprised," replied Lydia, making the best of the situation and advancing to give a hand to each. "I have believed that I saw this coming ever since my first day in New York. There is no one in the world who will hope more for your happiness than I do. Cousin Ida has been a kind friend to me right along, and as for

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you, Mr. Van Kirk," — Lydia freed her hand from Ida's to press it upon Maxwell's, which she already held, — "you are like my own. I could not be happy unless I knew you to be so. Ida has doubtless told you that I intend to right the wrong you have suffered, so far as a woman may."

"No," said Mrs. Fuller, "I have left that for you to do; but I have told him that you know all he has concealed."

Miss Bagg released the strong hand, but continued to look affectionately into her secretary's face.

"How soon can we go to Mr. Galbraith's?" she asked.

Van Kirk's brain was too heated to guess her meaning at once. "What have you to do there?" he asked, again slipping his arm around Ida.

"I have to carry out Uncle Jotham's wishes," replied Lydia simply.

"What is this?" asked Max, beginning, but only in a half-interested way, to perceive her meaning.

"Why, I intend that you shall have your rights, of course," answered Miss Bagg.

Van Kirk gazed at her, half-smiling. "You wish to give me your money?"

"Not all of it, of course," said Ida, and her lover could feel her heart begin to quicken under his hand.

"No, of course, not all of it," added Lydia. "I know you too well to propose that. I shall keep a plenty for my every wish. The rest I desire and intend to give to you."

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"And do you really think I could take it?"

"Maxwell, of course you will take it," exclaimed Ida, looking up at him, her cheeks burning. "It is only right. It burdens Miss Bagg. To be rid of it will relieve her, and for you to receive it will restore harmony to your mother, to you, and to me, — perhaps even to Cousin Jotham, — who knows? Mr. Galbraith will second Miss Bagg strongly. If you love me, do not dream of refusing!"

Her intense tone, Miss Lydia's earnest gaze, enlightened Van Kirk and made havoc of his dream of happiness. Every high hope was suddenly paralyzed. A merciless chill succeeded to his rapture. He seated himself in the chair by the desk, and turned pale as he stared at the carpet. The moment was pregnant with sickening disappointment, a thousand times greater in intensity than that had been which proved to him the loss of his guardian's fortune.

The women thought he was considering Miss Bagg's generous offer. As a matter of fact, he was perceiving in pitiless clearness the cause of Ida's sudden graciousness, and receiving the deathblow to his obstinate belief in her truth and womanliness.

"Sit down, Miss Bagg. Take a chair, Ida," he said, breaking the short silence and speaking without excitement. "I am sorry I have kept my promise and done my work so poorly, Miss Bagg, that you should feel burdened with anxiety."

Lydia flushed with eagerness. "Nothing of

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the sort, my dear sir, nothing of the sort," she replied, "only you could work in a more unhampered fashion, if it were your very own business, your own property, you were handling. I think you know that I trust you implicitly. Tell me you do, Mr. Van Kirk."

Max met her anxious gaze with grave eyes. He nodded. "I am glad to hear you say so," he replied quietly. "If you trust Mr. Galbraith and me implicitly, can't you discard the sensation that your wealth is burdensome?"

"Yes, I am getting quite used to it," replied Lydia, simply, "only when Mrs. Carlyle and Ida told me so much of what you had been through, I naturally wanted to make things right."

"Fool!" ejaculated Mrs. Fuller, with none the less heat that the exclamation was mental.

"I should admire to give you most of the money," continued Miss Bagg. "I am old-fashioned and plain, and you are young; your friends are all fashionable people, and you have use for money; but the greatest reason of all is that Uncle Jotham wished it."

"We have no proof of that," declared Van Kirk shortly.

"How can you say such a thing?" demanded Ida.

Miss Bagg lifted a deprecating hand. "I can tell what he must have felt for you by my own feelings," she said. "He knew you and watched your progress from childhood. I have known you

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for months only. Do not refuse me, dear Mr. Van Kirk."

In his sickness of heart Max gave perhaps insufficient weight to the speaker's earnestness. The fact of Ida's cupidity was so overpowering that the possession or non-possession of the money became immaterial by comparison. Now that he knew that wealth would buy her and that wealth was attainable he would not have it. If she were to grow cold toward him when the hope of it was withdrawn, he preferred to know the truth and bear the pain.

"I must refuse you, Miss Bagg," he began.

"Beware!" cried Ida, her eyes kindling. "I warned you, as you loved me, not to refuse. Do you go on, regardless of that?"

Miss Bagg regarded the excited woman with amazement.

Max looked at his fiancée, and spoke with quiet self-control. "The subject of love has no connection with this business matter," he replied deliberately.

"You are behaving cruelly, selfishly!" exclaimed Mrs. Fuller, very white. "Will you dash happiness from my lips a second time?"

Van Kirk winced visibly.

Miss Bagg's slight form seemed to dilate. "As you speak thus before me, Mrs. Fuller," she said, with righteous indignation, "I take the liberty to remind you that there are many things in this world that money will not buy. The love of a

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prince among men is one of them. You are the one who should beware lest you throw it away." She rose. "I will leave you now; but first, Mr. Van Kirk, let me tell you seriously that I feel that you have a moral right to Uncle Jotham's money. This subject may be reopened between us at any time you like, and you will find me always of the same mind I am in to-day."

Van Kirk rose, and as she gazed at him he took both her hands. "Thank you, my good friend," he answered. "Circumstances make me firm in my intention to refuse your offer. I used to believe that wealth would bring me happiness. I do not believe it now; I thank you, though — thank you with all my heart."

There were tears in Lydia's eyes as she passed out of the door and closed it behind her. As soon as she was gone Van Kirk advanced and stood before Ida, who returned his look hardily.

"What is going to be done about this?" he asked.

She smiled ironically, and her hands grasped a chair-back behind her. "I suppose you are going on, a grubbing clerk, for the rest of your days?" she replied.

"And a grubbing clerk is an individual with whom you wish to have nothing to do?"

She looked into the wretched eyes that contradicted the smile on the pale lips. The two gazed at each other in silence for a moment, then the hard look melted from Ida's face, and, bursting

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into tears, she flung herself on the broad breast, and the man's arms closed naturally around her.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"I cannot give you up," she sobbed. "Why will you be so cruelly obstinate?"

"If you cannot give me up, we shall be happy," he answered firmly. "Listen to your heart, and nothing else."

"And will you sacrifice nothing of your pride and obstinacy for me?" she asked, clinging to him.

"I will not sacrifice my self-respect for you; for if you ask it you do not love me, and if you do not love me I must live my life without you."

She pushed him farther from her, and her tears ceased. "Your ideas of love and mine differ," she said. "I will leave you to think these matters over. I cannot believe you will prove obdurate. Take a little time to choose between your Quixotism and me. No, do not speak. I love you. I shall never love any other. I never have loved any other. Max," — she glided back close to him and kissed him ardently, — "show that you love me."

Hastening then from the room, she closed the door behind her and, sending for her wraps by a servant, left the house without again seeing Miss Bagg.

Van Kirk sat down at the desk and supported his head between his closed hands. Hours passed away ere he changed his attitude, and the house was as still as a house of mourning.

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CHAPTER XII.

OLIVE MEETS THE JUDGE.

WHEN he finally stirred from his cramped position, it was to touch the spring of a secret drawer in the desk before him, and to take therefrom a little bundle of letters. It was a package which Mr. Galbraith had found among Mr. Bagg's effects and had given to Max, who returned it to the secret drawer which had been its home for many decades. He had never examined these letters, and now some fresh feeling of tenderness for the old man led him to take them out of their wrapping and gaze at them curiously. They were rather loosely tied with a bit of twine, and were all folded and addressed in the fashion which prevailed before envelopes were invented. The addresses were written in a fine hand, and had faded almost to illegibility. Max untied the package and ran the letters over, counting them idly. On one he observed that across the address there were lines written blackly in Mr. Bagg's well-known hand. There was a date in the corner, that of his last dinner-party. How long, long ago it seemed as Max looked back!

This is what he read in the old man's writing:

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"There has been a girl here to-night with your name, singing your song in a voice nearly as sweet as yours. The old times came back to me. I have been reading this, your last letter, again. I was wrong, all wrong. I wonder if you have forgiven me? I have done what I could for Max, but I will do more. For your sake I have just destroyed my will, and to-morrow I will make another, leaving him everything. My dear boy, all that I have of you now. He must possess all that is mine to give. I wonder if you will know?"

That was all. A moisture crept into Van Kirk's eyes as he finished. In his present mood this revelation of his guardian's heart and the adjective applied to himself touched him deeply. He slipped the one of his grandmother's letters bearing the message into his pocket-book; then after thoughtfully turning the others over once more he carried them across the room to the open fire and laid them on the red coals, where with a sudden brilliant blaze all the record of girlish joys and sorrows that filled their pages vanished forever. So here was proof in black and white of his old friend's intention toward him. How nearly the glory of this world had been within his grasp! Had he been older, or had the ten years of his youth and manhood been spent in different surroundings, the idea might have been more intoxicating to him. As it was, the longing for this wealth had shown those nearest and dearest to him in a degrading light. His mother had collapsed mentally and physically

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in sheer anger and mortification at its loss. His dainty, graceful, beloved cousin — he could not bear the thought of her recent looks and words.

As he stood watching the shriveling, blackening paper on the hearth, there came to him the story of a king, who, demanding of a philosopher a phrase which should alike modify too violent joy and console in the deepest affliction, received for his answer: "This, too, will pass."

"This, too, will pass," thought the young man. "Some day somebody will burn my letters and give me a wondering, compassionate thought."

Then he looked at his watch. It was half past three. He must go to the office. As he passed through the hall he met Miss Bagg, who started at sight of him.

"Mr. Van Kirk! Have you been in the house all this time? Why, you have had no lunch."

"True. I forgot it. I must hurry down-town now. I will get something."

He passed out, leaving Lydia in deep trouble of mind. She gave free rein now to the intuitive shrinking from Mrs. Fuller which she had fought against ever since they first met.

A great man has vigorously said: "Don't talk. What you are thunders so loudly above what you say that I cannot hear you."

No matter to Miss Bagg henceforth what the young widow might say; a look in her eyes, a tone in her voice, there in the library, were impressed upon Lydia's memory ineffaceably. She

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wondered if the lover had seen and heard with her eyes and ears. She wondered what had occurred after she left the room, and while timidly and tenderly compassionating the young man's sorrow, she hoped most heartily that the tie which bound him to his cousin had been severed, no matter how rudely. She walked up and down the hall after Max had disappeared, deep in thought. Suddenly she stopped and clasped her hands. "I have been a fool!" she exclaimed. "It would be ruinous if I should give him the money. I see it now. She would marry him then, of course. If his love for her is strong enough to force him to change his mind, and he should come to me and say so, I must be firm. I must take back my promise. I must break my word. She is so unworthy of him. She will never marry him without the money, and she shall never marry him for it, for I will hold on to every cent — every cent!"

Lydia began to walk up and down again, engrossed in her exciting thoughts, when a latch-key turned in the lock of the hall door, which opened, revealing her secretary followed by two ladies.

"I met these people on the walk and came back to see that they found you," he said, and stood aside for Mrs. Carlyle to pass and receive Miss Bagg's cordial greeting. He turned to Olive under cover of their words.

"Do you remember singing 'Mary of Argyle' the last time you were in this house?" he asked.

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"Indeed I do, and how it amazed me that Cousin Jotham liked it."

"Liked it so much that he made a memorandum of the occurrence on a bit of paper which I just found in his desk."

"It excited you to find it. You are pale," said the girl.

"Yes, it was like a message from another world, but I thought you would be pleased to know."

"So I am," she answered, and her innocent eyes dwelt upon his wonderingly. It was a new thought to her that Max had really loved the old man so much. His face was quite changed. But her mother was speaking: —

"This is my big, little girl," she was saying, and Olive instantly came forward to make a conquest of Miss Lydia's heart.

"This is your daughter," exclaimed Miss Bagg, taking the girl's hand and gazing at her loveliness with deep pleasure.

"And I am so glad to meet you," said Olive, returning her look with frank interest.

"Are you, my dear? I hope we shall be friends."

"I will say good-by once more," said Van Kirk, seeing that all was likely to go easily without him.

The three turned and nodded as he passed out.

"Now I am going to take you right up to my room," announced Miss Bagg. "No drawing-room visits with you. We shall just have a cosy sit-down together. You will see I have the nicest

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room for it in the world, thanks to — yes, to Mrs. Fuller. Come up."

They followed her upstairs, where the lovely apartment burst upon the Carlyles' view, and elicited exclamations of admiration which Lydia scarcely heard.

"You are going to take your things off?" she said, with such evident anxiety that they should consent, that mother and daughter smiled and glanced at one another.

"Oh, you must," added the hostess insistently. "Ever since I met you yesterday, Mrs. Carlyle, I have been making the most of our connection in my mind. Did your mother tell you?" — turning to Olive.

"Yes, it was quite an adventure, even for mother, who is always having adventures."

A maid with red hair, who had been sitting in a corner of the room mending, here came forward and took Mrs. Carlyle's bonnet as she removed it.

"These ladies are kinsfolk of mine, Nora," said Miss Bagg, and by her sprightly tone Nora knew that this visit pleased her mistress exceedingly.

She gazed at Olive with the most candid admiration.

"Sure I 'm glad they 've found ye, mem," she said.

"So am I," added Olive. "I never saw such a pretty room in my life."

"Neither had I before I came here," remarked Miss Bagg; "but then I had seen very little."

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"It did not look like this in Cousin Jotham's lifetime," said Olive.

Miss Lydia regarded her with interest. "If he was Cousin Jotham, I am Cousin Lydia," she remarked. "Do you think you can make a cousin of me at short notice?"

Olive smiled and colored, looking prettier than ever.

"Thank you for letting me try," she answered. "I imagine it will come very naturally. Oh, you have a parrot."

She had removed her hat and jacket, and in her best dress of rough, dark material moved across the room. Nora simply gazed after her, forgetting the wraps with which her arms were laden.

"Oh, you funny Polly," said Olive, standing by the cage looking at the Judge, who, perhaps in ironical recognition of the despised name, looked at her sentimentally, puffing out his cheeks and allowing his beak to part slightly, giving the effect of an insipid smile. "Does she talk, Miss — Cousin Lydia?"

The Judge suddenly laughed in his deep bass, and the visitor followed suit in her girlish treble.

"Oh, what a voice!" she ejaculated, and Nora came forward like an animated hat-rack.

"Indade he can talk, mem," she said eagerly, for Miss Bagg was busy with Mrs. Carlyle, whose attention had been attracted by a fine etching. "He knows iverything, the Joodge does."

"I wish she would talk, then," replied Olive.

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"'T ain't a she at all, mem. His name is Joodge, mem, an' he knows it jest like a Christian, mem," replied Nora volubly.

"Oh! Have you had him long?"

"Miss Bagg has had him always, mem. Sure, I guess they miss him in Ashley, where we did live before we came here. Iverybody knew the Joodge."

"Is n't he wise-looking? See him stare at me."

"He 's that wise, mem, ye would n't belave it. Our house in Ashley was half-way up a hill, mem, an' in the summer-time, whin the Joodge hung outdoors, mem, he was after drivin' the farmers wild, mem. Whin they was ridin' by with a heavy-loaded wagon, jest as they 'd be passin' our house the Judge would holler out 'Whoa!' an' the horses would stop, an' niver a bit could they get the load up the hill, mem, till the driver 'ud come to me an' shake his fist an' tell me take that bir'rd in."

Olive laughed. "You naughty bird," she said.

The Judge looked at her. "Come, kiss me," he said, following the invitation by realistic osculation.

"He 'll talk fast enough, mem, whin he hears the rest o' yez talkin'," said Nora, becoming conscious of her burden and bearing it away to the adjoining room.

This visit of the Carlyles was the first of many. Lydia grew very fond of mother and daughter and

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they of her. She spent many a Wednesday evening at the house in Twenty-fourth Street. Lydia was eager to help in Mrs. Carlyle's good work, and her personal interest was added to the open purse with which she aided that lady in her schemes, while Van Kirk dispensed the regular sums which were applied for, for more conventional charities.

Mrs. Van Kirk and Mrs. Fuller left the city and repaired to some Southern resort in the effort to restore the former's health. Miss Bagg could not discover on what terms Max and his cousin had parted. She did not even know whether their engagement continued. Her secretary's manner told her little. He seemed to have lost a certain boyish gayety which in the first days of their acquaintance had frequently belonged to his manner; but that might be due to the engrossing nature of his novel business cares. She saw little of him except at meals. He seemed glad to know of the pleasure she experienced in her intimacy with the Carlyles, and was uniformly courteous and polite to her, but so far as she could discover he did not go into society at all and lived a life absorbed in business duties, which dissatisfied her.

The winter wore away, and spring, which is often truly "lovely spring" in New York, took its place. Flowers, if not to be plucked from the stone pavements, were to be had for small price at every corner, and bloomed in shop-windows and in the buttonhole of nearly every passer-by.

How Olive Carlyle enjoyed the drives which she

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took with Miss Bagg in Central Park! The gratitude and delight of the fresh young girl gave Miss Bagg some of the keenest satisfaction she had ever known. Olive's fondness for her was genuine, and Lydia felt it with lively pleasure.

One day when the latter entered the now familiar parlor on Twenty-fourth Street, the girl drew aside the portière and led her friend to the easel, where, draped about with soft silk, Miss Bagg beheld a life-size crayon portrait of herself. It was delicately done and very truthful. The little curls, the slender nose, the thin lips, were all portrayed with a nice touch.

Lydia looked at it half a minute in silence, then suddenly burying her face in her hands she burst into uncontrollable tears.

"Dear Cousin Lydia," exclaimed Olive, distressed, throwing her arms around her, "why do you cry? Tell me."

"It is so si-si-silly," sobbed the little woman. "I 'm ash-sh-shamed."

"Dear me," returned poor Olive. "I did not think you would take it this way. I was wrong to surprise you."

"Forgive me," said Miss Bagg, speaking thickly, but regaining her self-control. "I am ashamed to tell what made me so foolish; but I must tell you or you will misunderstand." She wiped her eyes. "My first thought was of the beautiful work you have put into that portrait; my second, that it was a pity that there was nobody in the world to

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care for such a great picture of me; and that made me feel so lonely that I — I — cried. It was so selfish and silly that I am disgusted with myself. But, oh, Olive," — she took the girl's hand and drew her closer, — "get married, dear, and have children to love you and think there is no one in the world like mother. It is hard to be alone."

The girl kissed her cheek. "You are not alone. I'll not let you say it. Whom did you suppose this picture was for?"

"Why, I supposed," replied Miss Bagg, timidly, "that you made it for me. Did n't you?"

"No, I did not do anything of the kind. I don't make pictures for fun — ever. That was an order. That is mother's picture. She wants to hang it in the parlor for our own benefit and also where the girls can look at it Sunday and Wednesday nights. They are beginning to regard you as their patron saint, you know. I ought to charge her full price for it, but she says if I do she will send me a board bill, so I refrain."

"Oh!" Miss Bagg crossed her hands before her, and regarded the portrait with a thoughtful smile. "It is a beautiful picture — of a homely woman," she said after a while.

"Of a dear woman," added Olive, emphasizing the correction with a little hug.

"You do make lovely pictures," continued Lydia. "Do you know, I've thought sometimes as I have watched you at work that I would like to have a portrait of Mr. Van Kirk."

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"Apollo with a mustache?" suggested Olive, stepping forward and rearranging the silken drapery.

"Could you do it for me?"

"Well, Miss Bagg, — I dare say I could."

"Right off?"

"If you can give me the photograph. There was a perfect one in Cousin Jotham's album."

"Do you like to be paid in advance?" asked Miss Bagg.

Olive laughed. "Oh, no. No satisfaction, no pay, is my unalterable rule. In this case it ought to be no pay at all. You give me so much pleasure."

"Not half so much as you give me," replied Lydia sincerely. "It is only right I should pay you."

So far in their acquaintance, though constantly visiting, or driving, or dining in their company, Miss Bagg had not given Olive or her mother a present of any sort. Their simple, plain way of living and dressing seemed as comfortable to her as her own. From her long habits of economy it simply did not occur to her to spend money for what she did not see to be necessary. They knew she was not stingy. That was evident in the willing, even eager, alacrity with which she gave to the needy when she found them through Mrs. Carlyle; but this state of things made it the easier for Olive to enter into a business arrangement with her now.

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"You know you said you never do pictures for fun," added Miss Bagg, smiling.

"But that one would be fun," answered Olive, her softly curved cheeks warming.

"All the better for you. You should have a good subject now and then."

"You never suspected why I begged you to have your picture taken," said Olive gayly.

"No, indeed. How should I? Now, I am going to drive right home and see if I can get that photograph, and we will surprise Mr. Van Kirk."

"Not unless he promises not to burst into tears," replied Olive saucily.

"Ah, there are plenty to care for his picture," said Lydia plaintively.

"But Ida Fuller will probably claim it," returned the girl quickly. Miss Bagg stopped as she was crossing the room and looked full at Olive.

"What do you know about that?" she demanded.

"Nothing," responded the other with lively interest. "What do you?"

"Oh, I thought they were mutually interested," replied Miss Bagg cautiously. The day she left the engaged couple in the library, she registered a wise mental vow to say nothing to any one of relations which seemed so suddenly to become strained.

As days went by and Mr. Van Kirk did not allude to his cousin, she was strengthened in this determination. It was often a hard trial to keep

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silence to the Carlyles, since she was so truly attached to the young man under her roof, and now she had hoped Olive might know something of the matter. Evidently she did not; but the girl nodded her fair head wisely.

"I am sure they are mutually interested," she said. "I think he has been dismally blue ever since she left town. I am often tempted to say something saucy to him when he comes here. Why should he expect us to console him?" Then, after a pause: "Where has he been lately? He has not been here for more than two weeks."

"Don't ask me. The poor fellow works too hard, but he is coming now, on paper, as fast as horses can bring him," returned Miss Bagg briskly, "so good-by for a time. In Uncle Jotham's album, you said?"

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CHAPTER XIII.

MR. VAN KIRK'S PARABLE.

THE wife of Judge Spencer, the great lady of Ashley, had kept up her interest in the woman whom Dame Fortune had snatched from that little hamlet. Her occasional letters with their bits of home news had been eagerly welcomed by Lydia throughout the winter, and were a valued link connecting her with the old life.

It was about the middle of May when a letter from Mrs. Spencer arrived, and was handed to Miss Bagg one evening at the moment when she was about to sit down to dinner. Sometimes this meal was a solitary one, but on this occasion her secretary took his place opposite her.

Miss Bagg felt that all was not well with this young man. A line had come in his forehead since he had been under her roof. He never laughed any more. The boy had changed to a man before her eyes. There was no hope of penetrating his reserve, of helping him in any way. His courtesy to her continued unfailing, but his manner did not invite sympathy. Miss Bagg was forced to make indifferent conversation, or to keep up her own part in it, when her kind heart was

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longing to help him with all its resources. The Carlyles were a blessing to her as furnishing subjects in which she could take unaffected interest, and which sometimes struck an answering spark from Max; and to-night as she tore open her letter to give an anticipatory glance over its contents before the deliberate reading, some words caught her eye which reminded her that here, too, was something that she could share with Van Kirk.

"You know I was telling you," she said, looking at her vis-à-vis and slipping the letter back into its envelope, "that a boy from our place entered the academy at West Point some two or three years ago. This Mrs. Spencer who writes to me is his mother. Such a time as there was when he passed the competitive examination and then was admitted to the academy! The judge was delighted; but poor Mrs. Spencer nearly cried her eyes out. She never wanted him to go, and if ever there was a boy that was homesick and miserable, I guess Ralph Spencer was that boy the first year he was there."

"Not an unprecedented experience," remarked Max as she paused.

"Were you homesick?" asked Lydia.

"I believe I was," returned Van Kirk. Miss Bagg was glad to see him smile, and determined to make all the capital possible out of her subject.

"I judge from what little I saw in the letter that Ralph is nearly through there," she continued.

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"Then his homesickness is a thing of the past, and all he pines for now is freedom."

"I guess so. He was home last summer for the first time in two years, and he had one or two of his classmates with him; I did n't see him, but was n't Mrs. Spencer a proud and happy woman, and did n't those young men make a stir in that quiet little town! They only staid a short time, then they all went off somewhere together; the judge, Mrs. Spencer, Baby, and all."

"The young men could have dispensed with Baby, no doubt," remarked Van Kirk.

"Oh, she and her brother are devoted to one another. No, indeed; if anybody was to be left behind it would n't be Baby. That is what seems to be the matter now," said Miss Bagg, taking the letter from her pocket. "Some disappointment to Baby is troubling her mother. It is about West Point, so I 'll just read it: —

"'A great disappointment has befallen Baby. This year Ralph goes into his first-class camp, and it is a time they have looked forward to as a great occasion for Baby to visit him. Now my poor sister has decided to submit to an operation which will give her her only chance for life. It must take place in June. If she lives, I could not think of leaving her, and if she does not, Baby would have but a sad visit, for of course she could not enter into the gayety of the post. I wish I could hear of some one going there for the graduation exercises who would be willing to take my poor

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child under her wing and let her have another sight of her brother before anything occurs to sadden us.'"

Miss Bagg paused and looked up.

"From all of which I gather that Baby is somewhat more mature then her name would signify," remarked Max.

"Yes: I suppose she is about eighteen or so. It is a nickname."

"Well, your friend is not above giving you a broad hint."

"Me? You don't suppose she wants *me* to go as — as" —

"As nurse-girl? Yes, it looks like it."

"Why, I never thought of such a thing. What in the world should I go to West Point for?"

"For the same reason that scores of other people go, — to see one of the prettiest places in the country. What sort of a creature is the — a — young person? Inclined to suck her thumb and behave in a generally inoffensive manner?"

"I am not much acquainted with Baby," answered Lydia. "She has been away at school ever since she entered her teens. I feel that she has grown entirely away from me."

"What had you thought of doing for your summer outing?" asked Van Kirk.

"I had n't thought of taking any."

"Oh, you will have to go somewhere, of course. You can't stay in town in the heat."

"Then I shall ask the Carlyles what they are

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going to do. Perhaps they will let me go with them."

Max shook his head. "I doubt if they do anything beyond going to Coney Island occasionally for a day."

"Then why can't I do the same?"

"You can, if you like; but there is no reason for it. The Carlyles would take more of a vacation if they could."

"Oh," said Lydia again. Her mind did not move quickly, and while she grappled with this new idea Max looked at her and smiled with more of his old expression than she had seen for many a day.

"You remind me of a canary which my mother once brought home from a bird-store. She had bought a roomy cage for its accommodation, and she removed two of the rods in the side of the tiny wooden prison which had been the creature's home hitherto, and drove him into his new one. Hopping in, the bird stood on the floor of the large cage, and, although looking all about him, did not attempt to fly up to the perch so comparatively far away. Instead of that, he turned around and around in the same spot, unable for some time to believe that he was able to make any other than the circumscribed movements which he had been so long accustomed to. Do you read my parable?"

"Mr. Van Kirk!" exclaimed Lydia, hiding her delight to see him regard her with something of

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the old spirit under a tone of mock severity, "I shall go to Europe, if you are not careful!"

"All in good time," rejoined Max; "but first I advise you to go to West Point, and take Olive Carlyle with you."

"Why, you don't say so," ejaculated Miss Bagg.

"Yes. It would be giving the girl such a treat as she never had in her life, and you would have a pleasant companion."

"I suppose it would oblige Mrs. Spencer very much," said Lydia slowly.

"Let the infant be an after consideration. It would be a good trip for you and Olive in any case."

"Oh, of course if I went I should take Baby," answered Miss Bagg decidedly.

"Very well, then. Shall we consider it settled? If you wish to go up there in time for graduation, as your friend desires, I must see if you can get rooms; for the hotel is always crowded."

"Well, well. Not so fast. Not so fast," exclaimed Miss Lydia. "I must consult Mrs. Carlyle and Olive first."

"Oh, there will be no trouble about that. Three weeks will give Olive time enough to get her finery."

"Finery? What does one want of finery to enjoy scenery in? We shall not mix with whatever fashionable people there may be at the hotel."

"No, but there are other features at the post to be taken into consideration besides the Highlands

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and the river, — features which will be pretty sure to take Olive into consideration. The girl must have the right kind of things to wear."

"Then I am afraid the expense will stand in the way," replied Lydia earnestly. "You know very well the Carlyles" —

She paused, because Max was looking at her with such a quizzical smile. "Does n't the bird dare yet to try its wings?" he asked at last. "Strike out. Soar a little, Miss Bagg. You will find you do not encounter any obstacle."

"I should like to know what you are driving at now?" asked Lydia, somewhat on the defensive.

"Why, it occurs to me that if I were a woman I should not ask for a handsomer doll to dress than Olive Carlyle."

"What an idea!" exclaimed Miss Bagg, wondering, yet pleased both with the notion and her secretary's interest.

"Yes. Don't do the thing by halves. Tell Mrs. Carlyle you want her daughter's company, and so you ask the privilege of preparing her for the trip as well as taking her."

"Well, well, well!" Miss Lydia thought a moment. "You 've been there," she said finally, "you know the place. What would Olive need?"

"Oh — a — oh" — Max leaned back in his chair and laid down his knife and fork, looking vainly about for an inspiration. "You know those thin things — those mosquito-netting things girls wear to parties?" he said finally, "with — frills and all that?"

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"Indeed I don't," declared Miss Bagg, gazing back at him.

They looked at one another earnestly and anxiously. There was not even a waitress present to sympathize in their quandary. Miss Bagg always dismissed the servant early in the dinner. It made her nervous, she said, to have her standing about.

After a minute of helpless silence, the expression of Van Kirk's face changed. The horizontal line returned to his forehead, and he went on with his dinner. "If Ida were here, she would know exactly what to say. As it is, you had better leave it to Olive. Visitors at West Point sit or ramble about out-of-doors by day, and dance by night."

"My dear sir," exclaimed Lydia. "I can't dance, and I would n't if I could."

"No, but Olive doubtless can and will. You will have your hands pleasantly full to chaperon her."

"Especially with Baby, too," returned Lydia, looking rather dubious and apprehensive.

But her apprehensiveness did not last long. Olive's delight when the plan was proposed, Mrs. Carlyle's calm and Mrs. Spencer's fervent gratitude gave Miss Bagg a comforting sense of being in the way of her duty, and she yielded herself fully to the novel and pleasant experience of dressing a beautiful young girl.

It was hard to tell which of the two most enjoyed those visits to the dressmaker. Olive's

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good sense did not desert her in these intoxicating days. She knew what was fashionable in dress quite as well as though she belonged to the Four Hundred, and she knew beside what was artistic and graceful. Moreover, she was very careful not to impose upon Miss Bagg's generosity. The result was that Miss Carlyle was, for the first time in her life, the possessor of half a dozen new gowns at once, all made by a fashionable dressmaker, who did not often have so perfect a lay figure upon which to hang her creations.

Olive laid these costumes out upon the bed when they had all come home, and worshiped. More than that, she called upon her mother to worship, and Mrs. Carlyle surveyed their crisp freshness through her spectacles and patted the folds admiringly, standing back and drooping her head to one side in an attitude of thoughtful appreciation.

Olive laughed merrily. "Precious mother!" she exclaimed, slipping an arm around her. "She does not care one snap of her finger for anything in the matter — except your kindness, Cousin Lydia," for Miss Bagg was attending the exhibition, and looking on with much innocent satisfaction.

"Yes, I do," returned Mrs. Carlyle, taking her daughter's hand within her own thin one and giving it gentle little pats to punctuate her words. "I should have been sorry to have your life all one color, dear. You are going to have a real young-lady's good time. That should come once in a girl's experience."

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"Well, I should be perfectly miserable, if you were n't coming for the second week," rejoined Olive. "As it is, I am as happy as a princess. What a good fairy godmother you are, Cousin Lydia."

"Think of my living to be a fairy godmother to anybody," said Miss Bagg simply. "I ought to own it, — it would n't be honest of me to take the credit, — Mr. Van Kirk was the one to suggest this West Point plan in the first place."

"Why, how nice of him," answered Olive brightly. "You can give him as much credit as you like. There will still be enough left to gild you all over. Look at those dresses, — there are eight, really, for the black and the white evening gowns have each two bodices, which make four dresses of them."

"Yes, even the dresses," declared Lydia, rather reluctantly, it must be confessed; she found the young girl's gratitude very sweet, and would have liked to monopolize it. "He even suggested the dresses; I must own it. I am so slow and old-fashioned I should n't have realized what you needed."

Olive bit her lip and looked at the speaker, her deep blue eyes shining with a look that was not wholly pleasure.

"It seems to me that was rather out of Max's province," she said quickly.

"Nothing is out of his province that he can do to help somebody else. That is a wonderful young

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man," replied Miss Bagg, with devout earnestness. "I won't say he was any great assistance after the first general suggestion," she continued, in a different tone. "I did n't have any idea of what you ought to have, and all the help I got from him was 'frills and mosquito-netting.'" Lydia smiled, and the cloud cleared from Olive's brow as she joined in her mother's laugh and looked with restored satisfaction at the daintily simple wardrobe. This included three precious hats, two parasols, and a box of gloves, and its concrete loveliness haunted her dreams by night.

"I must tell Mr. Van Kirk just what we have," said Lydia thoughtfully, "and see if he has any" —

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Carlyle, with astonishing suddenness. "Please don't tell him one thing about it."

Miss Bagg looked at her in mild surprise. "Why, he might have something else to suggest," she said.

"We do not want his suggestions. I have everything heart could wish except a pair of evening shoes, and those I am going to get myself."

"Olive Carlyle. Why have n't you been honest with me?" asked Lydia seriously. "Is there anything else, Cousin Mary," — turning to Mrs. Carlyle, — "is there anything else this child ought to have?"

"Don't ask me," replied Mrs. Carlyle with a repudiatory gesture. "You are both of you way beyond my depth already."

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"Olive," — Miss Bagg looked up into the tall girl's face with the fiercest gaze of which she was capable, — "tell me straight off everything you can think of, or, as true as I live, I will give Mr. Van Kirk a full list of what we have, and make him give his whole mind to the situation. As he says, if Cousin Ida were here, she could answer every question."

Miss Carlyle tossed her yellow-brown waves of hair. "I know just as well as Ida Fuller what I want," she said defiantly.

"Then tell me at once, you naughty girl. Shoes?" — Miss Bagg touched her thumb, and prepared to check off the remaining requirements. "What else?"

"A fan," admitted Olive, her cheeks pink. Lydia grasped her first finger. "What else?"

"Go on, Miss Aladdin," laughed Mrs. Carlyle. "It is not every day you will have the wonderful lamp in your grasp."

"Nothing else," answered Olive.

"Nothing?" persisted Miss Bagg. "Think."

The girl laughed. "I have thought. My head has been in the most upset state of frivolity for weeks. I am only thankful there has n't been a pane in it, so mother could see in. No, even my cup will be full when I have some shoes and a fan."

"Get your things on," said Miss Bagg briefly. "The brougham is at the door."

Here was still a new experience for Lydia.

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Heretofore shoes had been shoes to her. Durable leather, sensible heels, had been all she looked out for. She was bewildered by the dainty articles which the shopman produced for Olive's pretty foot, and it was so amusing to see her doll in one and another of the delicate, glove-fitting, embroidered or buckled slippers and shoes, that Miss Bagg bought three pairs before she knew it, and then was delighted at her own perspicacity in discovering that this purchase necessitated an additional outfit of hosiery; and in great spirits she drove off with the jubilant young girl to make the final purchases for their laboriously planned fortnight's outing.

"It is proverbial that people who go to West Point for two weeks stay six," said Van Kirk oracularly, when Miss Bagg told him for how long to engage her rooms.

"Two weeks will be enough, I am sure," replied Lydia firmly. "Mrs. Spencer could not ask more of me."

"I have arranged matters in such a way that you can stay as long as you like," her secretary told her some days afterward. "It is only a part of your good luck that some people who had expected to attend graduation have been obliged to change their plans; otherwise there would not have been a foothold for you at the hotel."

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CHAPTER XIV.

MR. VAN KIRK'S PORTRAIT.

THE second week in June drew on apace. Olive finished the crayon head of Van Kirk, to Miss Bagg's great satisfaction. The girl had enjoyed the work more than any previous experience, but that, she thought, was easily explained. She had accomplished the picture entirely under the inspiring anticipation of her trip. As she penciled the short, crisp hair, or put in the droop at the outer corner of Maxwell's eye, her fancy reveled in the girlish finery which she knew was developing under the direction of the fashionable modiste, or she saw in perspective the Highlands of the Hudson, which once in her father's lifetime she had looked upon with childish non-appreciation.

"I could not have endured to work on an ugly face just now," she thought, leaning back and regarding the noble curves and harmonious lines in her handiwork. As it was, the head before her seemed to embody the poetry, the charm of life, of which she was to have her first, no, her second taste. Up to the present time she still harbored the belief that Cousin Jotham's dinner-party was a very happy experience.

"And the old gentleman liked my song," she

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reflected. "Yes, he liked it better than Ida's, a hundred times better than Ida's. Do you hear?" — leaning forward and gazing at the averted eye of the profile picture. Had the eye been gazing at her, she could not have challenged it so boldly.

Days passed by; the crayon head had gone to the framer's; anticipation was about to be merged in fruition; the happy hour of departure drew on. Olive's trunk was packed when one of Miss Bagg's servants came to the house with a note for Miss Carlyle, which stated that Miss Spencer had telegraphed the hour of her arrival. Would Olive come to dine with Miss Bagg that evening and meet the young lady who was to be their traveling companion? "Your brown dress will do," added Miss Lydia, for well she knew that the precious festal garments were packed, ready for an early start the next morning.

"Do! I should think it would do," thought Olive, viewing her tailor-made reflection in the glass. The serene satisfaction bestowed by a knowledge that one's gown is correct to the smallest detail filled her for the first time in her life.

"It is nonsense to preach against the folly of dress, mother," she said to her silently contemplative parent. "When a girl knows that her gown is right, she can give all her thought to more important things. It is a great economy of nerve force. Remember that, mother dear," — patting Mrs. Carlyle's shoulder with a huge assumption of patronage which struggled with radiant smiles.

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"Good-by, Olive; be a good girl," said her mother. She had used those words at every parting with her daughter for sixteen years.

"I don't know whether I am a good girl, but I am a happy one, the happiest girl in New York," replied Olive, turning the full light of her eyes into her mother's, softly beaming.

"I shall know you are good so long as you are happy, because I know you," returned Mrs. Carlyle. Then she watched from the window to see her daughter's trim figure move down the street.

"It is really the first flight out of the nest," she mused, "and she is a very beautiful bird. I am glad Cousin Lydia invited me for one of those weeks. She has never flown far herself. I do not know how she will guard my dove."

As Miss Carlyle walked toward her destination she found it not so easy to turn her thoughts to more important things than her costume. She luxuriated in its fit. At each of her long steps she knew that the flat folds of her skirt opened to just the right depth. There was not a threadbare nor a shabby spot upon her from her faultless hat to her neat boots. So far, she had not bestowed much thought upon the girl whom she was now invited to meet. Curiosity regarding the stranger grew as she approached the Bagg residence. Being completely ready for her trip, she could now take up the idea of this potential friend with epicurean pleasure as the next course in her feast of good things.

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Entering the house with the privilege of an inmate, she ran up the stairs to Miss Bagg's sanctum and softly opened the door a little way. The high, gentle tones of Miss Bagg's voice repeating

"Mary had a little lamb"

assured her that the parrot was giving an exhibition of his most remarkable performance. She paused in order not to disturb him. Admiration of the Judge was an emotion Olive quite shared. She believed him to be the brightest bird in the world, and she had been much interested in Miss Bagg's account of her instructions to him in this respected rhyme.

The voice went on with complacent preciseness:

"His fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb *would* go."

Perhaps Miss Bagg's nursery days were left so far behind that her memory was defective. At all events, the Judge gave the last line in this shorn style. In the next verse Lydia had told Olive she had been much annoyed by the slovenly and indistinct manner in which the parrot for some time persisted in slipping over some syllables of the third line; thus: —

"It made the children lup'n play."

Miss Bagg had wrestled faithfully with this lapse of the Judge's tongue, and had corrected it. This is what Olive now heard, a most reproachful accent on the emphasized words: —

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"He followed her to school one day,
Which was against the rule,
It made the children *laugh — and — play!*
— At school."

Somebody laughed in the room, — a laugh in which the Judge joined, drowning the human voice in his apparently immoderate merriment, ending with a long-drawn "Oh, dear."

Olive knocked loudly.

"Come in," exclaimed the Judge, abandoning his lady-like voice for a ponderous bass.

Miss Bagg came to the door, and greeted the girl affectionately. "The Judge was just saying some poetry for Baby," she said, drawing the visitor into the room.

"Come, boy," remarked the parrot, as he saw the new-comer, "come, kiss me."

A young lady sitting by the fire rose. "This is Miss Carlyle, Miss Spencer," said Miss Bagg.

The two girls looked at one another with veiled curiosity. We know what Miss Spencer saw. Olive's quickly withdrawn gaze took in the view of a piquant face, whose whiteness was striking, framed as it was in black hair carried rather loosely back and fastened in a coil by a silver arrow.

Miss Bagg regarded the pair with complacency.

"What is prettier than a young girl? Two young girls," she said to herself, paraphrasing an ancient conundrum.

"I have been so anxious to meet you, Miss

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Carlyle," said Miss Spencer, while she mentally pronounced enthusiastically upon Olive's beauty. "I wanted some one to help me sing Miss Bagg's praises. Is n't she good to me?"

"I don't know. Is she? She has been so good to me that I have n't had time to think of anything else," replied Olive, nodding with a smile to Nora, who approached from the next room to take her hat and jacket, — that jacket with the smart lapels!

"Then we shall have one emotion in common," said Miss Spencer, "from the beginning of our acquaintance. Miss Bagg, you are 'the link that binds.'"

"I am very happy to be that, Baby."

The young girl shook her dark head. "Not that name," she said; "Bertha."

"Oh, I keep forgetting," replied Miss Bagg, "although you have told me half a dozen times."

"No 'old man of the sea' ever equaled a nickname," continued the girl. "I wish parents would remember that and pause in time."

"Bertha is a pretty name. I do not wonder you wish to claim it," remarked Olive, as she took a chair.

Miss Bagg examined her from head to foot with kindly interest. The doll she had dressed was highly satisfactory.

"Well, Olive," she said, "don't you notice anything?" At this vague suggestion the girl looked first at Bertha, questioningly.

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The latter returned her gaze curiously, as though Miss Bagg's question was not surprising. Miss Carlyle's eyes roved about the room; and soon the color came into her cheeks.

"Oh," she exclaimed, rising. "What a nice frame!" for she had found the crayon portrait of Van Kirk hanging in a place of honor on the wall.

"Are n't you proud of your work?" asked Bertha. "Miss Bagg has been telling me you did that."

"I can't wait to hear what Mr. Van Kirk will say to it," remarked Lydia.

"Has n't he seen it yet?" exclaimed Olive. "I don't want to be here when he first sees it."

"Are you afraid he will behave as badly as I did?" asked Lydia, laughing. "I cried when I saw a picture she did of me."

"If the original of that weeps it will be for joy," remarked Bertha. "It looks like an ideal head. I don't see how you had the conscience to cater so to your cousin's vanity, Miss Carlyle. You see I know all about your relationship."

"Then you have solved a very complex problem," returned Olive, while she was thinking how foolish she should feel to have her handiwork exhibited to Max in her presence, and wishing she could think of some escape which would not seem more foolish still.

"Does he really look like that?" asked Bertha. "Excuse me, Miss Carlyle, but an artist must be tempted to flatter sometimes."

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"I am not an artist. I only copy photographs, and they are generally truthful, you know."

Bertha shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I would like to have seen him when he was a cadet," she remarked.

"Oh, I see; Cousin Lydia has been telling you at least a part of his history. You have a brother at West Point, I believe."

Miss Spencer looked at her new acquaintance with astonished eyes. Was it possible Olive did not know all about Ralph? Why were they going to West Point, if it was not to see Ralph?

"Yes," she answered, after a moment of half-offended hesitation.

"Have you ever been there?" pursued Olive.

"Several times, but only for flying visits. The first summer after my brother entered I was traveling in Europe, so I lost his yearling camp, and it did seem unbearable to think of losing this too. That is why I feel so grateful to Miss Bagg. Two weeks will be ever so much better than nothing."

"Do you sketch?" asked Olive.

It seemed to Miss Spencer an entirely irrelevant question, but she replied in the negative.

"I am so sorry. I hoped you could. I am going to try. All those places along the Hudson must give such lovely opportunities."

Bertha looked into the beautiful face curiously. "West Point does give all sorts of opportunities," she replied, then, after a pause, she added: "You are going there for the scenery?"

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"Of course," replied Olive; "I am not so lucky as to have a brother to visit. I suppose he eclipses the Highlands entirely in your anticipation."

Miss Spencer only smiled her slight, pensive smile; but she felt that there was a broad gulf between herself and this girl who felt so trifling and impersonal an interest in the haven of her own eager desires. She looked upon Olive with a sense of alienation, and postponed her opinion of their possible congeniality until she should find how Miss Carlyle responded to enlightenment of her present painful ignorance. Just how dense this was she determined to discover.

"Did n't you go to West Point at all while your cousin was there?" she inquired.

"No, not once."

"Not to see him graduate?"

Olive shook her head. "No, I never even thought of such a thing."

"Your own cousin!" exclaimed Bertha irrepressibly.

"He is not my own cousin," returned Olive, amused at the other's evident disapproval. "My mother was his mother's bridesmaid." She laughed, for Miss Spencer looked mystified. "The relationship is a little nearer than that, however," she added. "His father was some connection of my father's, but had it not been that our mothers were very fond of one another as girls, we should hardly have counted the relationship."

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The Judge, who had been standing on one foot, the other clasping his forehead and beak in a reflective mood, here began to march up and down his perch, grasping it hand over hand. He stopped suddenly. "Mr. Van Kirk! Oh, Mr. Van Kirk!" he called.

"Yes, he is coming," said Miss Bagg. "How quickly the Judge distinguishes his step!" She rose and hurried from the room.

"I was so afraid you would not come home," she said to Max, standing at the head of the stairs as he ascended. "We have guests."

"Indeed? Who?"

"Olive and Miss Spencer. Come into my room when you are ready."

"I will."

Miss Bagg reëntered the room, beaming. "He does not always come home to dinner, and I was so afraid he might not come to-night, not knowing you would be here," she said to the girls.

Miss Carlyle devoutly wished that Miss Lydia might have been disappointed, but she took up her post by the parrot's cage and gave her whole attention to him, leaving Miss Bagg to question her guest about affairs at Ashley.

In less than half an hour Miss Lydia opened the door to Van Kirk, who entered and was presented to Bertha, and greeted Olive with a cordial shake of the hand.

Miss Spencer's white face gained spirit and glow as he seated himself near her.

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"I am so glad to hear that you are a West-Pointer," she said.

Van Kirk smiled as he returned her interested gaze. Evidently the visitor considered that this fact constituted a bond of fellowship between them. He felt impelled to come up to her expectations, and cudgeled his brains to remember what Miss Bagg had told him of her brother.

"You are going up for the graduation exercises?" he said tentatively. He could not for the life of him remember to which class her brother belonged.

"Yes. I am glad we are going to be there in time. I suppose there are always some great men to hear speak."

"You will have a more personal interest another year?"

"Yes, indeed. Next year."

"Ah. Your brother goes into first-class camp this summer. A great time for him, — equal to furlough, a local proverb hath it. A great time for his sister, too. I suppose you know that you will receive enough attention to turn your head."

"I don't know," replied Bertha innocently, but she blushed. "I have never been there in summer."

"I see a proof that you are not wholly a stranger," remarked Max, looking steadily at a little bunch of three bell-buttons which depended from the slim chain which held Miss Spencer's watch. Each button was engraved with a monogram.

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She took the bright little globes in her hand. "No, indeed; I feel that I have lived the life of the academy by proxy, and I have met many of Ralph's classmates."

Miss Bagg had been listening to this exchange of amenities rather restlessly. She took advantage of the little pause that followed Bertha's last remark.

"Mr. Van Kirk, I have something here I want to show you. No, you need n't move. Just look up there."

Max did move when he caught sight of the portrait. He pushed his chair back a little and stared at it, quite as completely surprised as Lydia could have asked.

"What is that for?" he asked rather curtly.

"Me," responded Lydia more curtly, but with evident triumph.

The picture displeased Van Kirk. He had always been vastly ungrateful for that classical profile which had gained him the sobriquet of "Beauty" at the academy. To have the photograph which had been taken at old Jotham's command thus brought into life-size evidence was instinctively distasteful to him; but Miss Bagg's beaming satisfaction repressed any expression of his sentiments. Before he could decide on a safe comment she spoke again, while Miss Carlyle winced.

"Olive did it," added Miss Bagg exultantly.

"Olive," repeated Van Kirk, moving his chair

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again so as to confront the coloring face by the parrot's cage, "I did not know you did that sort of thing."

"That is not wonderful," returned Miss Carlyle nonchalantly. "I do not go about with a list of my accomplishments pinned to me."

"I never saw better crayon work," said Max, thankful that he had not injured two sets of feelings by an involuntary revelation of his own.

"How very good of you," returned Olive, without looking at him.

"You have paid me a great compliment, Miss Bagg," declared Max, gathering himself together.

"I think the world and all *of* it," returned Lydia simply, gazing at the picture with much satisfaction.

Miss Spencer waited to see if the subject of the portrait was disposed of, and then returned to the matters near her own heart. It was so agreeable to find some one who was familiar with the spot where she so often dwelt in spirit.

"I am particularly glad that we shall get to West Point in time for the graduation hop," she said. "My brother was so afraid I should miss it."

"Yes, that is always a very gay crush. You will be sure to enjoy it," replied Van Kirk; "but poor Miss Carlyle!" — looking at that preoccupied young lady. "You ought to have gone a little earlier so that she would have a partner, too. Olive, I wonder if it would do any good for me to sing —

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'Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight;'
Make me a cadet again just for that night —

so I could take you?"

"I have arranged that," announced Bertha solemnly. She looked at Olive as though hopeless that she would appreciate the magnitude of her good fortune, and resentful beforehand of such ingratitude. "My brother Ralph is making up Miss Carlyle's card," she added, still more impressively.

Olive looked, as she felt, astonished and mystified.

"Say 'Thank you' to the lady, Olive," said Max. "You little know what politeness that shows in Mr. Spencer. He is giving up escorting any of the charming girls he has a soft spot for, and engages to take you to the hop, 'sight unseen,' and secures all your partners for you for the evening."

Miss Carlyle looked from the smiling face to Miss Spencer's, preternaturally grave.

"I wish he would n't," she said simply, rather bewildered.

Max laughed outright. "Forgive her, Miss Spencer. After the hop she will fall on your neck and thank you. She does n't know the customs of our alma mater. How should you like to see a dance in progress, Olive, and yourself sit against the wall?"

"I should n't like it," admitted Miss Carlyle.

"Well, that horrible fate is what Miss Spencer's foresight has saved you from; and" — turning to

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Bertha and lowering his voice — "I think your brother will find that virtue is its own reward, don't you?"

Bertha nodded, and softened sufficiently to give her delicate smile.

"I thank you very much, I am sure, Miss Spencer," said Olive tardily.

She made her excuses rather early that evening. She had a few things left to do, she said, regarding her packing.

Max drove home with her. He found her disinclined to talk on the way, but his own thoughts were so ready to stray that when he handed his companion from the carriage before her house he was entirely surprised to have her pause on the sidewalk and face him.

"I want you to realize, Max," she said, low and hastily, "that I could not know that you disliked life-size portraits when I took Miss Bagg's order for yours."

"I — I do not dislike them," returned Van Kirk, even more amazed at her manner than at her words.

"I am very sorry," she pursued, unheeding him. "Nothing would have induced me to make the picture, had I known. As it was — it is my business. No matter about saying anything polite," she added hurriedly, as he started to speak. "Many people feel as you do. Good-night. Thank you for bringing me home."

She ran up the steps and into the house with

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such swiftness that Van Kirk stood and looked into space, bewildered, for half a minute.

This was a new Olive, — as new as her tailor-made clothes. His straying thoughts, half leaning toward business and half given to the vague ache that had become chronic somewhere in the organism of his mind, were reined up and concentrated with a sharp turn. He gave a long, low whistle before he reëntered the brougham.

As for Miss Carlyle, she went into the house a little consoled by what she had said; somewhat vindicated from self-accusations of the pleasure with which she had made Maxwell's picture. With her whole soul she now resented the pleasure. It had seemed to her that Max must suspect that she had done the work *con amore*.

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CHAPTER XV.

WEST POINT.

THE following morning Mrs. Carlyle accompanied her daughter to the boat, and bade the travelers good-speed. Her appearance was more conventional than usual in new garments which Miss Bagg and Olive had declared it imperative for her to have. She had yielded meekly to their wishes, and Olive felt very proud of her mother as she introduced Bertha and saw the latter come under the spell of Mrs. Carlyle's sweet eyes and voice.

"You are not going, Max?" asked the latter, in surprise, as the young man spoke, reminding the party that the time for adieus was up.

"Yes, I am going to see them safely settled," replied Van Kirk, "but I shall probably be back to-night."

"Only one little week, mother," whispered Olive fondly, as she kissed her.

The boat drew away from the dock, in the sweet June morning, and the much anticipated trip had begun. The wind was fresh, but even Miss Bagg refused to go inside. She tied a veil over her hat, wrapped a shawl about her shoulders, and, Van Kirk having found a comfortable spot for her, she

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drew her chair near the rail and gave her attention to the varied panorama which began to unfold. The young man's companions soon found that he was a complete guide to its beauties and could answer all their questions.

He had thought Olive's manner a little conscious when they first met this morning, but in her present pleasure all constraint vanished. The cares and disappointments of life seemed to Max to slip away as the boat ploughed through the water. The cheerfulness of his companions and especially Olive's silent gladness stimulated him, and lifted him out of the rut where he had been plodding.

The very sight of the girl was inspiring. Her softly brilliant eyes, with their shadowy lashes, the satisfying curves and coloring of her face, which grew only nearer to perfection in the unsparing daylight, formed a feast for the eye to enjoy. Bertha Spencer could not forbear an honest sigh of envy at the way Olive's hair turned to gold in the sunshine, every loose lock dancing into a little ring when the wind seized it.

The half patronizing, half indifferent sentiments which Max had experienced all his life toward little Olive Carlyle had sensibly changed for the first time during that minute last evening when she had paused on the dark sidewalk and uttered her words of self-justification. They revealed that he had hurt her, and he, in trying to recall on his way home the precise amount of ungraciousness that he had shown concerning the portrait, be-

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stowed more continuous thought upon the girl than he had ever given her, wondering with the curiosity of a discoverer to find her an individual of heart and spirit whom he could never again ignore nor flatter; and he regarded his mental picture with a mixture of surprise, amusement, and pique such as he might entertain toward a person who had stolen a march upon him.

As he regarded Olive now, he found a distinct satisfaction in the fact that she unconsciously owed it to him that she was standing here by the boat's rail with that eager delight in her eyes. He could not address her in the off-hand manner which twenty-four hours ago would have been the only natural one, and as Miss Spencer put to him many questions and comments he gave his attention chiefly to her as the boat sped on.

Those who have taken that trip up the Hudson know what our party enjoyed of beauty and variety of scenery between the Palisades and the Highlands, and those who have not beheld those enchanting vistas could not be made to see them by any pen-picture which might be introduced here.

At last the bell of the steamer uttered its signal to land at the broad dock, which to Bertha constituted the most welcome bit of view they had seen since they left New York. Her white cheeks took a pink tinge that was not all due to the river breeze, and her heart beat with joyful excitement.

"At last!" she exclaimed under her breath,

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and Olive smiled for sympathy with the radiance in her dark eyes. Van Kirk was smiling, too, at reminiscences of his own. The last time he had left a boat at the West Point dock it had been when returning to "jail" from furlough. How infinitely, hopelessly long the two remaining years had looked to him then in prospective. How short they and the four succeeding them seemed now as he looked back. He had thought that day, when restively resenting the return to rigid law and system, that all joy lay in the one word — freedom. He philosophized a little, moving along now with the stream of passengers, on the elusive character of this same freedom. Mankind were all slaves, he thought, if not to "taps" and "reveille," then to something else.

He was recalled from his reflections by the inevitable "Step along lively" with which the Hudson River official speeds his guest, howsoever lively said guest may be in crossing the gangplank.

Van Kirk had ordered a carriage to meet his party, and when they were ensconced the horses moved slowly up the hill.

"What a lovely place!" exclaimed city-bred Olive, her eyes resting upon the jagged, rocky height, with its masses of trees and foliage, which bounded their road on the left.

"Of course," replied Miss Spencer, her whole expression betokening that she had reached paradise, and that no development of its charms could

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in any way surprise her. "Oh, Miss Bagg, is n't it hard that I don't know when I shall see Ralph? He said he could n't promise anything, but that I was to expect him when I saw him."

"I wonder why that is," replied Lydia. "I supposed he would meet us at the boat."

"You must be prepared to wonder at a great many things for the next week, Miss Bagg," remarked Max. "You are at a military post now, — a little world by itself, — and you will find things different in many ways from anything you are accustomed to."

"Yes. I saw two or three soldiers down there at the boat when we came in," replied Lydia.

"Officers, Miss Bagg, officers," returned Van Kirk, smiling; "which reminds me of the captain who was in court for some reason, and, the lawyer for the defense referring to him as 'this soldier,' the captain hotly bade him to remember that he was an officer, after which the lawyer referred to him carefully as 'this officer who is no soldier.' There are a couple of soldiers now," — as two men in brown overalls passed the carriage.

"Where are their uniforms?"

"They do not require them for this work, which is keeping the roads in order. No one is employed here except enlisted men. You will see plenty of soldiers in uniform, however. There"—as the carriage turned and they passed a long, low building half covered with clinging vines "— there is the riding-hall, where cavalry drill is held in winter."

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"Yes," exclaimed Bertha, leaning forward, "and how glorious it is to see them ride in there!"

"The soldiers?" asked Olive.

Miss Spencer looked at her half impatiently.

"I have pictures of all these places, Olive," said Van Kirk. "I ought to have shown them to you and explained matters, so that you would be as much at home here as Miss Spencer. The cadets have their riding-drill in this hall. I am sorry you will not see any of it. The summer is not the season for that. They become very expert horsemen, and attract enthusiastic audiences to see their skillful exploits. Some of them enjoy it immensely, and some, down to the last day of the course, never conquer the distaste which grew out of the numerous mishaps they endured during their first lessons."

"I suppose you liked it, since you joined a cavalry regiment," remarked Olive.

"Yes; riding was the greatest pleasure I had here."

"Let me understand," said Miss Bagg impressively, "just what is a cadet?"

"A student in the military academy of the United States," replied Max. "Being lucky enough to pass his examination, he bids farewell to home and mother, and takes an oath of loyalty and service to the government, which government then proceeds to get him into shape to be a presentable and competent servant. This process is a severe one, and many cannot stand the strain.

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Tests are constantly to be endured along the course which eliminate all but the strongest specimens physically and mentally; therefore each first class of the academy may be regarded and respected as a survival of the fittest. We are now about to regard and respect Miss Spencer's brother in that light."

"To say nothing of Mr. Van Kirk," added Olive mischievously.

"Oh, let bygones be bygones," he replied good-naturedly.

"Why, what do they want to make it so hard for?" asked Miss Bagg.

"It is right they should. It has been estimated that each cadet the United States graduates costs the government from eight to ten thousand dollars. Naturally this outlay must be employed to fit the strongest men. There is the library, Miss Bagg. We are proud of the library."

Even as Van Kirk used the pronoun, he felt a twinge of regret. He had, of course, thought twice before deciding to come here, where it was certain that he would meet acquaintances who knew of his mortification; but the very suggestion of shrinking decided him to come. He would not submit to allow such thoughts to hamper his movements.

Miss Spencer gazed eagerly at the academic building and the barracks before the carriage turned into the road dividing the two plains, and approached the hotel.

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The stretch of green grass on the left, the majestic old trees with their rich fans of foliage, the glorious hills, and the sparkle of the river caused a throbbing of excited delight in Olive's throat which forced a moisture into her eyes. The air was the very breath of June; the sky azure, with downy puffs of cloud floating beneath the blue. The impression of the moment was one she never forgot.

Her involuntary glance met Van Kirk's, who exulted again at having been the means of bringing such a look into her face. Of such scenes Olive had known as little as the blade of grass which stretches to the light between two cobblestones in a New York pavement.

Miss Bagg looked up at the hills, and took a deep breath in enjoyment of the welcome, spacious quiet after the confined din of the city. "This is a beautiful place, I must say," she remarked, in tones of hearty satisfaction.

The carriage stopped at the hotel, and Van Kirk assisted the ladies to alight. There were a few people on the piazza, among them an officer, who started at sight of Max and stepped forward, only restraining himself as he saw the two ladies.

Van Kirk met him with outstretched hand. "Cary, I remembered that you were here."

"Van Kirk, old man, delighted to see you!" exclaimed the other, returning the cordial grip.

"I'll be back in a minute;" and Max ushered his companions into the house, where they were

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shown to their rooms. These commanded what Bertha pronounced "such heavenly views" that the three could hardly tear themselves from the windows. At last Bertha and Olive could come into full agreement, and Miss Carlyle was so entirely happy that Bertha forgave her for the dual crime of not having anticipated seeing Ralph nor studied his surroundings.

A good dinner added to the well-being of the party, and afterward the feminine portion of it devoted themselves to unpacking. This operation was, at least in Bertha's case, interrupted by such frequent excursions to the windows that it became a matter of length.

"Oh, I think this academy is the cruelest institution!" she exclaimed at last. "I can't help keeping my ears and eyes strained for news of Ralph, and I think" — A knock at the door interrupted her, and Van Kirk's card was handed in. Olive took it and read the penciling on the back.

"He says if we come down in ten minutes we can see the light battery drill. I'd like to know what that is."

"Oh, hurry!" exclaimed Bertha joyfully. "I wonder if Ralph is in it. Pin up your hair, Miss Carlyle. These dresses will do. Do you like cannon, Miss Bagg?"

"Cannon! Mercy, no, Baby."

"Yes, you do," said Bertha coaxingly. "At any rate, you like the circus, don't you?"

Miss Bagg was considerably bewildered by this

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mixture of ideas, but she yielded to the excited girl's admonitions to hurry, and when the ten minutes were over the three joined Van Kirk in the parlor. With him was the lieutenant who had spoken to him when they arrived. He introduced him as a friend who belonged to his old regiment, and who was now detailed at this post as an instructor.

Miss Bagg regarded the officer's shoulder-straps with much respect.

"What do you instruct in, Lieutenant Cary?" asked Bertha, buttoning her gloves.

"Tactics," he replied.

She gazed at him. Here she was actually speaking with one of those awful beings known as tactical officers; one of those creatures who rejoice in making life a burden to the innocent cadet. He was shameless enough to avow his calling, and yet his face was not that of a villain.

Miss Bagg was speaking again. "Mr. Cary, does light battery really mean light? Bab — Miss Spencer said something about cannon."

"They do make a good deal of noise," replied the lieutenant, "but the exhibition drills are always interesting. How would it be to go over on the library steps, Van Kirk?"

"I am not sure I want to see it," said Miss Bagg, hesitating.

"Oh, yes, you do," replied Max. "We will take it at a little distance. You would not miss it for anything."

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They set forth from the hotel, Max and Miss Bagg ahead, while Cary followed with the young ladies.

"What kind of an officer is he?" asked Lydia. "What rank?"

"A lieutenant."

"I did n't know what to call him."

"You did right. 'Mister' is accounted quite good enough for a lieutenant."

"You must give me some lessons in shoulder-straps," said Miss Bagg, "so I shall know who is who. What were you?"

"I was a second lieutenant. My shoulder-strap was precisely like that of a general — only lacking the star."

Van Kirk's little joke was quite lost upon Miss Bagg, who was intent upon information.

"And Mr. Cary's is the same, I suppose," she said.

"No, he is a first lieutenant. You will see that he boasts a bar in his field."

As they reached the chapel and turned east, Miss Lydia observed a uniformed young fellow carrying a bayonet and walking slowly along the sidewalk.

"Is that a cadet?" she asked.

"No, that is a soldier — a sentinel."

"What is the matter with him?" asked Miss Bagg, for, as they approached, the sentinel brought his heels together, swung his body about, backed about three steps, looked rigidly before him, changing the position of his rifle in a couple of jerky

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motions, while Lydia gazed, much mystified. "What ails him?" she whispered.

"Cary," returned her escort briefly. "He was saluting an officer," explained Max as soon as they had passed.

"Oh!" Miss Bagg turned around for an involuntary, wondering glance at the lieutenant.

"This will be a very good place," said Cary as the party seated themselves on the library steps. "You will get a bird's-eye view, and distance will lend enchantment for Miss Bagg."

"I think it would be ever so much nicer over there in the crowd," sighed Bertha, "where we could see their faces."

"No, indeed," exclaimed Miss Bagg nervously; "you might get shot. Stay right here with me. Oh, look at that!"

For now the cavalry plain began to fill.

"Look at those men all in snow-white," exclaimed Lydia, as horses in teams of four, each span driven by a mounted soldier, drew the caissons and cannon about the field. The caissons were manned by white-clothed cadets, who sat motionless with folded arms. Cadet officers mounted on prancing steeds gave orders. Miss Bagg was reminded of an ancient engraving of a Roman chariot race she had seen at Ashley, as the horses galloped around the plain in a circle, the dust rising from the wheels. At last a halt was called. Instantly the statuesque figures became nimble. Descending from their perches with precisely unan-

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imous movements, they fired the cannon, the reverberations echoing among the hills. Then as swiftly reascending, they assumed a motionless posture with folded arms; off galloped the horses to a new position; then came the signal to halt, and the explosions again awoke the echoes. This was repeated with many varying manœuvres.

Around and around rumbled the heavy wagons. The dust flew in clouds, the guns boomed, sometimes singly, sometimes with simultaneous roars from six deep mouths. The smoke rolled up and away against the mountains, fading in feathery mist. The thud of the horses' feet, the grinding of heavy wheels, the notes of the bugle, the sharp explosions, the alertness of the white-clothed figures, made a thrilling series of sounds and sights against the marvelous background.

After the first fire Miss Bagg forgot to cry out, and as for Bertha and Olive, they were absorbed in interest.

When it was over Max looked at Miss Bagg. "Well, would you have missed it?"

"Not for anything," she replied, drawing a deep breath. "I feel as if I had been in a battle."

"Where West Point gets ahead of other shows is that Nature stages things as nobody else can," remarked Van Kirk. "Now, I suppose, Cary, if we want to see parade it behooves us to hurry in order to get seats."

"It does, indeed. See, some have gone over already."

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They arose and moved away. The sentinel again showed spasmodic symptoms at their approach, jerked through his evolutions, and passed into a respectful trance, and Miss Bagg began to be so infected with the martial spirit that she walked very straight as she passed him, and felt a share in the attention. Cary was just ahead of her this time, and she saw him return the salute.

"If you had n't left the army the sentries would have to do that to you, would n't they?" she said wistfully to her secretary.

"Yes. I shall have to put a guard on my right hand, or I shall be responding to some of these fellows, cit as I am. I have n't been out of the habit long enough. It gets to be entirely unconscious. A friend of mine, who has been in the army about ten years, told me he went to the circus one day, and when the clown came into the ring and saluted, he responded."

They were walking quickly along the path which edges the infantry plain, and Max looked with curious sensations across at the window of his old room in the barracks.

Miss Bagg's attention was suddenly attracted by a novel figure. It was that of a young man whose uniform of matchless gray and pure white revealed the symmetry of his strong, compact form. He carried his head erect, his shoulders back, and walked with an elastic, measured tread. The golden buttons on his wrinkleless coat glittered richly. As he advanced, he fixed his eyes on Lieutenant Cary with a keen gaze.

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"What kind of a soldier is that?" asked Lydia, as, Cary looking up, the young man raised his hand to his cap in a dignified salute.

"That, Miss Bagg, is an embryo officer. At last you have an object lesson in what a cadet is; and you will not forget — Hello!" and Van Kirk looked with interest as the cadet stopped, lifted his cap, and seized the hand that Bertha Spencer offered him.

"Mr. Hemenway."

"Miss Spencer."

Each was evidently delighted to see the other.

"Where is Ralph?" exclaimed Bertha. "I have been here hours. Miss Carlyle, let me introduce Mr. Hemenway. Mr. Hemenway, Miss Bagg; Mr. Van Kirk. Where is Ralph? I will never forgive that wretched boy!"

"Oh, yes, you will," returned the young man, after acknowledging these hasty introductions. "He received your telegram too late to get a permit to go to the hotel, and he is over there looking for you among the crowd at the present moment. The seats are filling, and I will not detain you. I will find Ralph and bring him over."

Our party moved on. Bertha walked on air. "I haven't seen my brother for a year," she said to Cary. "Do you blame me for being impatient?"

"No, indeed, and West Point is a rare place for trying the patience of mothers and sisters."

"I should think so. We haven't any rights at all," replied Miss Spencer aggrievedly.

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They walked on beneath the fine old trees, and succeeded in getting good seats fronting the parade ground. Bertha kept her eyes strained for a glimpse of Ralph, and at last she was rewarded by the sight of two tall gray and white figures, stepping like one man, in one of whom she recognized her brother. She started to her feet. A minute more and her hand was in his, her eyes, a little moist, met his own. Perhaps he felt as glad, even as affectionately sentimental as she; but he only squeezed her hand after kissing her, and said in a low tone: —

"This is immense, Babe, is n't it? So glad you could come."

"That is n't Ralph Spencer!" exclaimed Miss Bagg.

"Don't tell me you 've forgotten me," said the cadet, coming forward to shake Lydia's offered hand.

"Why, I should n't have known you. I should not, indeed," declared Miss Bagg, regarding his erect and elegant figure. "Why, you look so much *bigger*, and don't you remember how you used to stoop *over*?"

"Did I?" asked the young man, not altogether relishing these personalities because of a girl in brown who was watching him, an unconscious smile touching the corners of her mouth. This was the season when new relays of summer girls spring up each morning at the Point like fresh daisies on the plain; and Mr. Spencer, like his

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companions, was used to their arrival and expected it; but it is not often given to cadet-kind to see such a face and form as Olive's, even in that haunt of lovely maidens.

Under the circumstances, Miss Bagg's reminiscences made the young fellow's dress-coat feel even warmer than usual, and when his sister laid her hand on his arm to introduce him to Miss Carlyle, he experienced a double pleasure in the relief from Lydia's comments and the discovery that this beauty was the individual for whose behoof he had made a fraternal sacrifice of his hop-card. If virtue always recompensed its followers as promptly and handsomely as it had done in this case, he thought life would be well worth living.

"Where were you during the drill?" he asked of his sister, who read the surprise and approval in his eyes with secret amusement and satisfaction.

"Over on the library steps. We were lucky that Miss Bagg did not insist upon our viewing it from across the river," replied Bertha. "Ralph, I want to introduce you to Mr. Van Kirk. He graduated from here four years ago."

"Does n't it make you homesick to come back, Max?" asked Olive.

The ex-lieuteuant shook his head.

"Do you think any one would like to go through this mill twice, Miss Carlyle?" asked Ralph, with the smile which his sister thought the most beautiful that ever illumined a man's face.

"Why, it is the loveliest place I ever saw," re-

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plied Olive. "I think you are very much to be envied."

Spencer shook his head in his turn. "I believe it is generally admitted that a bird does n't like his cage any better because the bars happen to be gilded," he answered.

"I think you are very ungrateful," said Olive, and as all comment from lips like hers is flattery, Ralph would have liked to linger and enlighten her, but his friend Hemenway laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Worse than ungrateful, Miss Carlyle," he remarked; "Mr. Spencer is growing poetical, and with him that always means getting a 'late' a little further on. Come, Ralph."

"All right." Spencer turned to his sister. "I am not sure, Babe, that I can see you this evening; I 'll try to make it; but if anything prevents, why, I will see you at guard-mounting in the morning."

The two friends made their adieus and set off down the path toward barracks. They were both tall, and nearly of a height; their white trousers swung forward in steps of exactly the same length. Their faces, the instant they ceased talking, wore a dignified and unsmiling, almost stern expression, which seemed to betoken that they had found life a serious affair, as, indeed, they had, — at least for three years. There was an alert and concentrated gaze in the keen eyes, which had been trained never to overlook anything, including the ubiquitous instructor, who is to be saluted even from afar,

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or else a fate befalls which in the cadets' classic vernacular is described as being "skinned for not worshiping an officer."

Miss Lydia and her two girls looked after their retreating forms admiringly. They saw them lift their right hands to their caps in an unbending salute to Cary, who had drifted down the path to talk with some friends.

"If I could walk like that," declared Miss Bagg, regarding the two erect figures, "I would n't do anything, seems to me, but just walk up and down in front of a looking-glass. This is where you learned how," she added simply, looking up at Van Kirk. "I have noticed you never put your hands in your pockets and slouch."

"Those young men certainly can't indulge in anything so unsoldierly," replied Max, "for they have n't any pockets."

"What? No pockets at all!"

"Not one."

"But their handkerchiefs," exclaimed Miss Bagg.

"They carry those up their sleeves."

"Well, it 's a wonder the government lets them have anything so comfortable as sleeves," said Lydia. It was a remarkably sarcastic speech for her, but she was beginning to feel the infection of sympathy for the cadet and the defensive attitude toward Uncle Sam which by some occult law seizes a woman soon after she sets foot in this fair corner of our native land.

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Max smiled. "The cadets could not look as though they had been melted and poured into their uniforms otherwise," he said. "Don't be too hard on the powers that be. You see they turn out an article of very military appearance by their methods."

He looked at Miss Carlyle, whose expressive face showed her intense interest in every feature of her novel surroundings. "Glad you came, Olive?" he asked, after the pause during which he had watched her.

She lifted her eyes to his. "I was just thinking," she returned slowly, "how glad I am that I am alive."

"Did it never occur to you before to appreciate that?"

"I believe not. I never heard birds sing like this before. Why don't all these people stop talking, so one can hear the notes better?"

"There you see the objection to living," remarked Max. "One has to grin and bear so many things."

"Thank you for the allusion to my graceful manner of endurance," returned Olive, "but I can afford to be very compassionate of an unfortunate who must tear himself right away from this enchanting spot."

"You are not rid of me yet. Cary says he can put me up, and he won't hear of my leaving tonight. I think I will stay over a day."

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE REVIEW.

"GUARD mounting, Miss Carlyle." Bertha woke her friend the next morning with these words, and the alacrity with which Olive came to her senses and grasped the situation planted her more firmly than ever in Miss Spencer's good graces. The parade the evening before had aroused much enthusiasm in our trio, and now they were eager for a new phase of the military spectacle, and, dressing themselves quickly, left the quiet house and came out into the brilliant June morning.

The river sparkled, the hills wore their morning fairness, the towering elms arched above the avenues, and bird songs trilled and fluted across the expanse of the peaceful plain. Miss Bagg and her girls looked toward the turreted gray pile on the other side as they sauntered along, pausing at Trophy Point to drink in new draughts of pleasure from the view.

But Cro' Nest, Storm King, and the other famous guardians of the beautiful river had more than one rival in Miss Spencer's heart. "Come," she said practically, "the view won't run away and the cadets will."

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Even as she spoke, her averted eyes caught sight of two military figures on the path opposite Professor's Row. "Ah, there they come now," she added.

The three hastened to meet the young men, who greeted them cordially.

Bertha fell behind with Mr. Hemenway, as her brother gravitated naturally to Olive's side.

"The weather is very good to us," observed Hemenway, looking extremely content with his situation as he took his companion's parasol and held it over her.

"Dear me," returned Miss Spencer, "have you been at West Point three years and can't talk about anything but the weather?"

"Give me time," said the cadet, naturally injured.

"Especially in June," continued Bertha ruthlessly. "If the weather deserves credit for being pleasant in June, when may we expect anything of it?"

"I only mentioned it because I was so glad you could come out," replied the young man, with the meekness which even members of the war-school will sometimes display when the enemy has a dimple in each cheek and says insolent things in a sweet voice.

"Yes, we had to come without our breakfasts," remarked Bertha. "It is all very nice for you, who have had your coffee. It seems that hardships are in the very air here."

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"You might talk about hardships, if you had to march to breakfast by moonlight, as we do lots of times."

"They could n't make me," returned Miss Spencer, with a little grimace of defiance. "I have always understood that getting up early in the morning was equivalent to cleverness. I am cured of that idea."

Mr. Hemenway knew it was not safe for him to inquire into the cause of this disillusion, yet he rushed upon his fate with the valor of his calling.

"How is that?"

"I think with a very ordinary degree of brightness you might have found me — us — during light battery drill yesterday."

"Now, Miss Baby," — the first-sergeant chevrons on Mr. Hemenway's sleeve flashed in the sunlight as he brought one hand down in an earnest gesture.

"Oh, what is the use of saying anything about it?" interrupted the clear, sweet voice. "If you had wished it" —

"I did wish it," ejaculated the badgered young man in tones nearly as stentorian as those in which he announced to the adjutant at parade that Company C was "present or accounted for."

"Then you would have done it. We were there," declared Miss Spencer incontrovertibly. "You can't think," she added in a different tone, her dark eyes looking straight up into her companion's, "how I was longing to see — Ralph all

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the while. I was so impatient as time went by that I nearly mentioned the Dutch hotel."

"What?"

"Why, the Dutch hotel. Did n't I ever tell you about it? But I ought not to. I have no right to come up here out of the wicked world and attack the morals of a 'cadet and a gentleman.'"

"Go on. Tell me." Mr. Hemenway took heart of grace to smile for the first time.

"You won't report me? Well, summer before last, when we were in Holland, I happened to see the advertisement of a hotel. The name of it was Dam!"

Miss Spencer's velvety eyes again met those of her escort in an impressive gaze. He made a broader display of his white teeth.

"Oh, wait. It is no laughing matter. The advertisement read: 'Hotel Dam. At Hoekdam in Edam, between Amsterdam and Volendam.' When I had finished reading that card I felt as *wicked!*"

Mr. Hemenway's laugh caused the trio before them to look around.

"We may as well sit here," suggested Ralph, stopping at a seat midway of the plain.

Miss Bagg looked anxiously about. "I am afraid Mr. Van Kirk is going to miss it," she said.

"He has seen guard-mounting before," remarked Ralph.

"Look, look, Miss Bagg," cried Bertha, for the

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gayly uniformed band appeared on the crest of the hill at their left and marched silently across the plain. The sun gleamed from their brasses as their measured tread fell upon the soft green turf.

The bird-notes still rang clearly through the morning hush. There was no sign of life in the houses that lined the farther side of the avenue, and but few spectators were seated under the great trees.

"There they come, — look down toward barracks," said Mr. Spencer.

Six eager eyes were immediately turned toward the broad sally-port, through which rows of bayonets began to gleam. The thrushes and robins were overpowered by stirring strains from the band, and the gray and white figures of the cadet guard came through the heavy stone arch and moved in "double time" out upon the plain. Their evolutions to the rhythmic music made so pleasing a spectacle that it seemed a marvel to Miss Bagg that any one within a mile was willing to miss seeing the display.

She came to herself as the silent band marched back again across the road toward their barracks, to find her quartette of young people chattering.

"We would like to take Miss Spencer and Miss Carlyle around Flirtation Walk this morning," said Mr. Hemenway to Lydia, as in a few minutes they all paused at the hedge before the hotel.

Miss Bagg looked scandalized. "I would prefer they should not go," she replied quickly.

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Bertha looked distressed. "Why, we must see it, Miss Bagg; everybody goes."

"Say no more about it, Baby," said Lydia, with determination. "I will take you myself some day, if it is a proper place."

"Oh, there is an embarrassment of riches in the way of picturesque spots about here," remarked Ralph carelessly. "I suppose you will have no objection to the Chain Battery Walk, Miss Bagg?"

Lydia looked at him thoughtfully. "I should say certainly not," she replied. "It sounds as if it might be quite educational."

"One of the most educational institutions we have," he declared promptly, in his frank, engaging manner.

"I know the whole town is full of historic interest," agreed Miss Bagg heartily.

The cadet smiled upon her.

"I must begin your military training, I see. West Point is a post and not a town."

Lydia looked into his bright face, and, thanking him, gave him her hand to shake. She was grateful to him for accepting so pleasantly her veto upon the morning plan. What charming brown eyes and what well-cut, aristocratic features the young fellow had. As he paused that moment with his cap lifted and she remarked the waves of short, dark hair above his forehead, she felt sorry for the mother who could not be here to see and glory in him.

Osborn Hemenway stood like a gray monument,

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waiting. Strength was expressed in every line of his face and figure. His lips twitched now in a boyish smile, pleasant to see on his young face.

He was the first to speak when, after making their adieus, the two cadets turned away.

"Miss Bagg is evidently inclined to do the dragon business thoroughly," he said, as they struck off across the plain with that gait and carriage which a spectator at West Point feels to be a criticism on the average human being.

"Yes, and after Ashley precedents. It is of no use to argue with such people," replied Spencer airily.

"So I perceived that you thought," returned his companion, with a grin of appreciation.

"Miss Bagg is a good little woman," said Ralph, "and a mighty lucky one. Miss Carlyle appears to be part of her good fortune. She calls her 'Cousin Lydia.' I don't understand it. She seems to be a howling swell; but I can only be grateful that Miss Bagg inherited her. By Jove, how bewitching she looked this morning!"

"Yes," responded Hemenway, with such evident preoccupation that Ralph laughed him to scorn.

"Confess, now, you are jealous of my good fortune."

"What good fortune?"

"Oh, no nonsense. To think I am her partner for to-night."

"That is all right," returned Hemenway equa-

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bly. "You seem to have forgotten that I take your sister."

"That is a fact," admitted Spencer with tardy brotherly appreciation, "and I will say for Babe, if she is n't a goddess, she gets there just the same when it comes to a matter of dancing."

"Fairies are ahead of goddesses every time in the ball-room," remarked Hemenway. "I 'll tell you what I 'll do with you. I 'll give you one of my dances with Miss Carlyle for one of yours with Miss Baby."

"Done. You won't go back on it when you find that Miss Carlyle dances like a feather?"

"No." The reply was brief and quiet, but Hemenway's chin was of that contour which did not suggest a habit of "going back on" anything that he had said.

It was about eleven o'clock that day when Van Kirk's card was brought to Miss Bagg's room, where she was engaged in unpacking and arranging her own and Olive's effects.

She came down to the parlor, and her secretary was glad to see a new vivacity in her face.

"Great place, is n't it?" he said, smiling, as they shook hands.

"I never saw anything like it," she responded. "Why did n't you come out this morning and see the guard — do things?"

"Well, I 've seen the guard 'do things' quite frequently; but the fact is, Cary and I talked most of the night and we slept late. I thought

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you and your maidens might like to go for a walk about now."

"The girls have gone with Ralph and Mr. Hemenway, but I should admire to. I want to learn the pretty places."

"Yes, and you could not have a better day than this to see Flirtation. Put on your bonnet, Miss Bagg, and let us go."

Lydia, who had risen, paused. "What *is* this Flirtation?"

"Come and see."

"It does n't seem as if I ought to, for I would n't let the girls go. I did n't like the sound of it, and I feel a great responsibility in the care of those girls."

"Well, come and learn the way; then you can take them yourself."

With this reasoning Lydia soothed her conscience, and putting on her wrap and bonnet sallied forth with her escort.

Going down the flight of steps at the back of the hotel, they immediately became embowered in the leafy labyrinth through which the narrow path threads its way.

Max had as a cadet done his full share of rambling through this historic walk. His companions hitherto had been younger than Miss Bagg, but it is safe to say that not one of them had been so alive to the beauty which nature with a lavish hand has scattered in this favored spot.

Flowers, wild strawberries, ferns, mosses, high

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granite walls, and soft, interlacing foliage; now a broad glimpse of river and hills, again a green, shadowy glade in the dense depths of forest. Miss Lydia enjoyed and wondered at it all, longing, as each new vista entranced her gaze, for the moment when those dear, defrauded girls should revel in this nearness to nature's heart. All her enjoyment was tinged with a slight guilt.

"Listen," said Max. Miss Lydia, following his example, stood still. The mysterious murmur of a rushing underground brook contrasted with the bird-calls in the trees. All about them was the June freshness of a wild woodland scene.

Miss Bagg looked at her escort. "Oh, those poor girls!" she exclaimed, unable longer to keep silence; and even as she spoke, two couples appeared around a curve in the path, sauntering at a leisurely pace.

They were two young ladies and two immaculate, tall cadets.

"Why, Miss Bagg, I am so glad you are here," cried the first girl, who was Bertha Spencer, with unmistakable sincerity. "Good-morning, Mr. Van Kirk. Is n't this heavenly?"

Mr. Spencer, who was following with Olive, began to redden. It was one of the moments which try men's souls.

Miss Lydia had selected him as the target for her bewildered, offended gaze, and he came forward. "I am glad you decided to try it for yourself, Miss Bagg," he remarked cheerfully.

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Van Kirk gazed at him rather superciliously. What right had this young sprig to be carrying Miss Carlyle's closed parasol through forbidden paths? Olive's sailor hat was perilously becoming. Her whole costume had something in its effect which heightened Spencer's presumption in Van Kirk's eyes.

"You see it is a lovely spot," added Ralph.

"I said the girls could not come here," declared Miss Bagg. "Girls, why did you disregard me?"

"Why, Cousin Lydia," exclaimed Olive earnestly, "you said we could come."

"I said you could go on some kind of a chain walk," returned Miss Bagg severely.

"The Chain Battery Walk; yes," said Bertha glibly. "This is it. Where did you think we were?"

"Did n't you say this was Flirtation Walk?" asked Miss Bagg of her escort.

He nodded, and could not repress a smile at the determined expression on Ralph Spencer's countenance.

"You can pay your twenty-five cents and take your choice of either name for it," replied Max, and his smile broadened. The others laughed, — all but Miss Bagg.

"Ralph Spencer, you have played me a trick," she said.

Bertha came forward and shook a finger at her. "What have you played us?" she asked, her merry eyes sparkling. "Told us we must n't walk

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around Flirtation, and as soon as our backs were turned, made for the very same spot yourself with a young man. Oh, Miss Bagg!" Lydia bit her lip and tried to look stern, but did not wholly succeed. "However, we 'll forgive you," continued Bertha magnanimously. "This walk is a rose that could not smell other than sweet under any name. We came in at opposite ends, did n't we? You have the most adorable places still before you. Be sure and take her out on Gee's Point, Mr. Van Kirk."

There really did not seem much for Miss Bagg to say. After her first natural resentment at being outwitted, she could not help being glad that the girls were sharing her pleasure.

"Forgive me this once," said Spencer audaciously, coming near to her and speaking caressingly. "Stratagem is one of the arts of war, you know. It is a matter of conscience with me to practice when opportunity offers. Have to show my gratitude to the Government so far as that, you know."

"You are a scamp," announced Lydia; but the corners of her lips were not very firm.

Hemenway could not have coaxed with such infectiously mischievous eyes; but Hemenway would not have put himself in such a dilemma. Subterfuge never even occurred to his straightforward and literal mode of thought.

The whole party were smiling when they separated and went their opposite ways.

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Van Kirk's thoughts dwelt for a long time upon Olive as she looked, standing there in the sun-pierced, leafy bower, with the earnest, anxious expression in her face.

"I think you are all going to have a pleasant time up here," he said at last.

"Yes, it is such a pity you cannot stay. Now, I want you to plan to be here all you can. You will, won't you, Mr. Van Kirk? You need a change as much as anybody. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. You have been a dull boy of late compared to what you used to be."

"Yes, I know it. I have had good reason."

Miss Bagg grew alertly attentive. If her beloved secretary wished to confide in her, she would be only too glad to receive his confidences; but he said no more. They strolled on at a very lover-like gait, he keeping sombre eyes on the ground.

"What is the news from your mother?"

"Very good. She is much better. They are coming home soon. I do not know yet where they intend to go during the summer."

"Perhaps you will want to spend your vacation with them," hazarded Miss Bagg.

"I am not in need of a vacation," he answered. "Here is Gee's Point. Would you like to sit down a minute?" He led his companion out to a seat among the rocks, where nothing intervened between them and the broad sweep of the river.

"If it had not been for you, I should have lost all this," said Lydia, as a white-winged yacht cut

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through the rippling water within a stone's-throw of them, its sails outlined against the picturesque banks beyond.

"I shall get you well trained into accepting my advice," returned Max, leaning back in his end of the settee and baring his head to the exhilarating breeze.

"Indeed you will, if you continue to prescribe such delightful things as West Point. I shall come to believe that you know ever so much better what I want than I do myself."

Van Kirk looked at the speaker, who was reveling in the view, unconscious of his gaze. Lydia still wore her little tuft of curls, and her gray hair was curly about her forehead. She was extremely well dressed in a quiet and tasteful fashion, and her easy, pleasant life had agreed with her so well that Max contrasted her appearance with that of the stranger he had visited one morning in Ashley and felt a pride in the change; for, after all, he had never rid himself of the idea which she herself impressed upon him, that she was more his protégée than his employer. He smiled at his paradoxical thoughts, but the smile was followed by a deep, involuntary sigh.

"To know, ourselves, what we want is quite an art," he remarked. "You know one says as the explanation of the petulance of a child that he does n't know what he wants. I think in the case of restlessness of children of a larger growth the explanation might often be the same."

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"Aha, my young friend," thought Miss Bagg, with a furtive look into his averted face, "if you have come to the place where you are not so sure what you want, there is a point gained."

But a sudden, disconcerting idea damped her exultation. Supposing her secretary were hinting at a change in his attitude of mind regarding the money. Perhaps he was paving the way for an announcement that he wished now to avail himself of the offer which she had assured him would always remain open.

Poor Miss Bagg! She felt that it would be so difficult to refuse him that her cheeks reddened, and surely none of the maidens who had preceded her as Van Kirk's companion in this favorite resort ever endured such agitation of the heart as now attacked her; but her determination did not waver. She would save the young man from himself. Whether or no he lived to thank her did not matter.

"Do you find you know better what you want as time goes on?" she asked, the line of her lips growing thin and firm.

"I know less and less," he replied moodily, and Lydia relaxed in every emotion and muscle.

The deep report of a cannon struck upon her ears. Miss Bagg bounded to her feet like the war-horse who scents the battle from afar. "Another drill," she ejaculated.

"No, wait a minute."

Soon a second signal reëchoed among the hills. Then another and another.

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"Some dignitary has arrived," said Max. "All the better for you. You will be likely to see some extra show."

"Then let us go back," returned Miss Bagg, with alacrity.

They returned to the woodland path, which from here is an arbor of arched and interlacing branches, and soon emerged into the sunshine near Battery Knox.

When they reached the hotel they found Olive and Bertha on the piazza with their escorts.

"The Secretary of War has arrived," announced Bertha, as they drew near.

"And now we shall probably be reviewed," added her brother in disgusted tones, as he rose and drew forward a chair for Miss Bagg.

"I wish his excellency had staid at home," ejaculated Hemenway. "The idea of wasting this beautiful afternoon."

"All the cadets will be reviewed on the plain," exclaimed Olive. "Think of it. I am ever so much obliged to the great man for coming."

"I did n't suppose you could be so heartless," observed Mr. Spencer reproachfully. "Wait till you see how little fun it is for the victims. Such a bore to stand there in the hot sun!"

"It will be very interesting," remarked Miss Bagg calmly, "and if the sun blazes down on you with double power, Ralph Spencer, it will be no more than you deserve."

"Now, Miss Bagg," returned the self-possessed

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youth, "that joke was on you, you know it was; but I will promise never to twit you with it."

"I shall be on the lookout for you after this," declared Lydia. "I am forearmed now."

That afternoon a large crowd gathered under the trees fronting the parade ground. Seats were at a premium. Double lines of gay and delicate summer costumes, flower-bestrewn hats, and rainbow tints of swaying parasols enlivened the scene. The air was full of an incessant, pleasant din of talk and laughter.

Van Kirk and an officer named Long stood behind the camp-stools where Lydia and her girls were seated. Olive's fluffy parasol of cream white, as it rested on her shoulder, framed her face when she occasionally turned to speak to one of the men, and each time she did so, Max wished more heartily that he were going to stay to-night and see her in the ball-room.

He was alert to observe the glances of admiration that rested upon her. He saw, without hearing, the remarks with which one called upon another to regard her.

"They will spoil her unconsciousness before the two weeks are over," he thought regretfully, — "if the dressmaker has n't done it already," he added with a dubious glance at the gown she wore. It was silky as a dove's plumage, and had such softness in its coloring; but Van Kirk thought with an uneasy sense of humor that the subtlety of the serpent might for all that lurk in its folds.

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"I would n't have the expression of Olive Carlyle's eyes changed for all the treasures of the world," he thought, and then it occurred to him that the circumstances did not warrant such intensity of sentiment.

Those eyes suddenly looked up at him from under a distractingly becoming hat, shaded with full, white ostrich plumes. Their gaze was warmly expressive, and as the girl was mute he suddenly eagerly lowered his head.

"I do not forget that I owe all this to you," she said in a soft tone. His gaze drank in the beauty of hers under the protection of her slanted parasol.

"To me?" he repeated.

"Yes, Miss Bagg told me. If it were not all so very delightful here, I dare say I should n't have thought of it again. As it is, — I have a grateful nature." She smiled, and when Olive smiled the deep corners of her lips curved exquisitely, and one dreaded a change even to the loveliness of their repose. "I have been thinking how Ida Fuller would enjoy being here," she added.

The name stung her hearer with hot pain. He sprang erect, murmuring some reply. The green plain seemed to him to wave, for the blood pressed in his temples. The passivity of his waiting attitude of mind was past.

His cousin's proud face rose before him. It wore no mask. She had not deigned to conceal or to assume anything. Why had it ever fascinated

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and tantalized him? What was there in it a man wanted in his home, by his fireside, in the mother of his children? He shrank from the brutality of his own tardy, just estimate. He despised himself in the old weary fashion of the disillusioned. What had captured his fancy in the dark-eyed widow had been so superficial that not the pain of discovering the unsubstantiality of her charm equaled his humiliation in realizing that such as it was it had been sufficient to excite the ardor of feeling within him which had incited him to such pleading and profession. If he still loved her, he felt that he could retain his own self-respect even mingled with self-pity; but there remained nothing but ashes from the transient flame. Recalling her face stirred no feeling in him but weariness, and sensitiveness as of a partially healed wound.

He beheld the pageant which began to move upon the greensward as one in a dream. He heard Lydia's soft exclamations; he knew that Long stooped and was answering her questions.

"Mr. Burton has not yet been relieved from duty," he heard him say, "otherwise I should be sporting a red plume out yonder."

"Who is that fine-looking man with the white mustache?" asked Miss Bagg.

"That is the Commandant of Cadets. You will not often see him in all his paraphernalia, but he and his whole staff of tactical officers take part in the ceremony to-day."

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Lydia gazed at the hundreds of gray and white figures ranged in long lines and absolutely motionless. They stood too far away for their faces to be distinguishable, even had the chin-straps of their caps not disguised them.

"They are so exactly alike," observed Miss Spencer, "that one comes to feel that they have no individuality, after one has looked a little while."

"Unless one has had occasion to observe them during these gala days of extra liberty," replied Long with a smile. "They are very individual as they hold parasols over pretty girls and stroll about in this vicinity. The parasol is to the cadet what the fan is to the Spanish lady."

"How interesting," said Bertha innocently, the ruddy color of her own sunshade reflected in her cheeks. "Do go on talking, Mr. Long. It is such a privilege to learn from one who has had experience."

"Yes, this is a great time for the young fellows," continued the officer good-temperedly. "They simply overrun the place, indoors and out. A professor's wife with a pretty daughter and a crowd of girl-guests confided to me yesterday that she should be thankful when the men went into camp. She said she had n't been able to turn around in her parlor for days without stepping on a cadet."

"Well, they 're not overrunning anything just now," observed Miss Bagg. "I should be thankful to see one of them move a muscle."

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"Just forget they are alive; that is the best way," said Bertha. If the lieutenant had ventured to make such a suggestion, how quickly the full battery of her indignant glances would have withered him!

"They look precisely like stuffed men," remarked Miss Bagg. "How tired they must be!"

"I suppose those plumed knights won't allow them to stir," said Olive.

"No," replied Long. "There is a tradition that a spider once crawled into a cadet's ear when he was standing at inspection, and, he remaining rigidly immovable, the insect crept so far that the victim lost his life from the effects."

"What Spartan could outdo that!" exclaimed Miss Lydia, in horror and admiration.

The officer smiled. "Who dares suggest that the Spartan ever lived whose endurance could surpass that of a free-born American?"

"Oh, I wish you had n't told me," said Miss Bagg. Ralph Spencer had doubtless behaved reprehensibly, but she drew the line at torture being inflicted upon him; and she wondered which of those round-chested, white-belted heroes he was, and whether the sun did feel very hot and uncomfortable.

"There is the Secretary of War," said Long.

A civilian walked out upon the plain, and attended by the superintendent strolled past the immovable figures. His costume was the ordinary Prince Albert suit and silk hat; but its effect as

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well as that of his gait became extraordinarily *negligé*, contrasted with the rich uniforms of his subordinates and the exactitude of military elegance which awaited his approval. Presently the scene changed. Not a cadet in the corps was more relieved than Miss Bagg when the band struck up an inspiring measure and, the long lines breaking into small companies, the battalion marched in "double-time" around the plain. They moved in a measured run, in which the officers, even to the stately commandant, joined. The white-gloved closed right hand of each man rose and fell rhythmically at every step. It was as though hundreds of snowballs played through the air.

"Well, that is the prettiest thing I ever saw in my life!" exclaimed Miss Bagg.

The vari-colored stripes and plumes of artillery, cavalry, and infantry, the glitter of bayonets, swords, and bell-buttons, the companies of strong, graceful figures running in perfect time to the gay and rhythmic music, might well rouse enthusiasm, especially as the spectacle was staged, as Van Kirk had truly said, "as only nature can do it."

"Oh, Miss Bagg," said Long, with mock resignation, "I begin to see symptoms. I am afraid you are contracting cadet fever. It attacks almost every visitor at the post, but occasionally one meets a woman who escapes, and who is able to feel a gentle glow for the officers. Such glorious exceptions are rare, though."

The companies were now retreating toward the

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barracks. Olive's eyes sparkled. "I want to follow the band," she said, starting up and facing Van Kirk, the halo of her parasol encircling her vivacious face.

He gazed at her and made no response. She blushed vividly, for she thought he considered her effusive.

"I wish I could stay to-night and see you dance, Olive," he said after a pause.

"Oh, are you going?" she asked, and her face sobered.

"Yes, I am going."

"But of course you will come back."

"Oh, occasionally, to see how you behave. I don't think I ever longed quite so much to take a vacation as I do just now. The perversity of human nature, I suppose, is at the bottom of it, but I should like to lie around here a few days."

"If I tell Miss Bagg that, she will make you do it. Is n't she your commanding officer?"

Van Kirk looked at the speaker a moment in silence. The blue fire of her eyes was vivifying.

"If you do tell her, I shall take it as an indication that you would like to have me come. May I, Olive?"

Van Kirk had been spending so poignantly bad a quarter of an hour that this question was a bold bid for a bit of consoling flattery. But with the quickness of thought Olive was on the defensive. Why or against what she knew not, but nothing could have been more candid than the surprised air with which she replied: —

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"Why, did you think we did n't want you? We are not such monopolists. Besides, you need not judge others by yourself. I like family parties, you know. Too bad you must go. Give my love to mother, if you see her."

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CHAPTER XVII.

OLD AND NEW CADETS.

By the time the lines of tents gleamed among the elms near Fort Clinton, Miss Bagg had made up her mind that two weeks at West Point were not enough. The girls were, of course, delighted with her decision. The "board of visitors" and several others of the guests had left the hotel; but many of the residents of the post called upon our trio, thanks to the fact that they were connections of Van Kirk, who had acquaintances among the professors, and also because the young people of the place are always hospitably inclined toward the visiting girl, and especially toward a relative of their cadet friends.

Mrs. Carlyle arrived at the appointed time, and then followed a season of pure happiness for Olive, when, her arm within her mother's, they strolled about the immaculately kept avenues, the girl constituting herself cicerone.

"You have read about riotous honeysuckle and roses?" said Olive, triumphantly, calling her mother's attention to the wealth of bloom straying thickly over fences and climbing to the second stories of the houses. "There you see them."

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"I don't wonder any longer that Cousin Lydia looks young," commented Mrs. Carlyle. "This place should give one new life."

The strains of "The Army Blue," performed by fifes and accompanied by drums, reached their ears.

"We are just in time to see the cadets come to dinner," said Olive. She drew her mother to the edge of the road, whence they could see the lines of marching figures advancing under the arching elms.

"So they even have to march to meals, do they?"

"Certainly. They march to everything, even to dancing and swimming lessons. The whole atmosphere here is so military that I dare say their roast-beef is served to them from the end of a bayonet; but I have n't asked anybody."

"What fine figures, and what strong faces!" remarked Mrs. Carlyle as the marching lines drew nearer.

Olive smiled. "You too?" she said. "Just say that to Cousin Lydia, and you will give as much pleasure as though you complimented a fond mamma. She has adopted the whole battalion. She enters into everything so energetically that I do not know which of us is having the better time. Her simple, earnest ways make her a favorite with everybody."

"Max did a good thing for us all, did n't he?" said Mrs. Carlyle as, the last cadet having joined

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the noisy crowd within Mess Hall, the two continued on their way toward the hotel.

"Indeed he did. Too bad he cannot take a large dose of his own prescription. Have you seen him recently?"

"Why, yes. Do you know, that boy has come to see me twice during the week? I had no idea he would miss Cousin Lydia so much, but I suppose it must be the loneliness at home that has brought him. He did not seem to have any special errand either time."

"Oh, you need not make any excuses for him," replied Olive, squeezing the arm she held. "I would have visited you twice myself the last week, if I could."

"But Max is not an infatuated being," returned Mrs. Carlyle, regarding a sentinel curiously as he passed them.

"I wish we had an officer with us," said Olive, "so you could see that soldier gyrate. I quite resent the indifferent manner in which they permit me to pass when I am alone. No, Max is not infatuated," she added, after a moment, "not even" — in a gratified tone — "with Ida Fuller, I believe."

"What makes you think so?"

"The way he looks at the mention of her name."

"Are you interested in their love affair?" asked Mrs. Carlyle.

"Yes, indeed." Olive gave a little laugh. "I nearly thought out a story once, with Max for the

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hero. He is so impressive and so fine. I see now why. He is always a commander, only out of uniform. To think he went through all this discipline, all this education, here in this beautiful place, so near us, and we saw nothing of him, knew nothing of it. Still, of course, I was too young," added Olive, in a tone which made her mother smile.

"Yes, and too poor and too — various other things. That was not a part of what is yours. We have always what is our own, — the very best thing possible for us."

Miss Carlyle gave her mother's arm another squeeze. "Is n't it perfectly delightful to forget poverty and West Twenty-fourth Street and the roomers and all care and dirt for a little while?"

"Indeed it is a great thing. How clean everything is! How spacious and airy and how full of this God-made perfume of flowers! Every sense is rejoiced up here. It makes me so glad that the girls are to have a glimpse of sky and sea, too. Miss Bagg has made it easy for me to give each one a little outing."

"I am very glad for them, and gladder for you," replied Olive, "for I think you need a vacation as much as they do, and you would not enjoy yours unless they had one."

"Young things need to frolic sometimes," said Mrs. Carlyle.

"Then you are glad I am frolicking, are n't you?"

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"Decidedly glad," responded her mother, smiling.

"I feel a little fraudulent," declared Olive. "I know the people here believe I am a wealthy New York girl. They often say things which show it. I answer them honestly, but I don't go into particulars and tell them I have an angel of a mother who took a hideous house years ago, and that she rents rooms and we do not keep a servant so that we can save money to help friendless girls; and that this mother and I wore dreadful gray shawls and threadbare jackets before the fairy godmother touched us."

"My poor little girl," said her mother, smiling.

"Even Bertha does n't know," added Olive.

"No matter," returned Mrs. Carlyle placidly. "We can tell her whenever the time comes for it."

Her daughter did not look as though this suggestion elated her.

"What I want you to consent to, dearest, is that we shall give up the house," she said cajolingly. "Let us live in the simplest way, we two together. Cousin Lydia's help in your charities alters the complexion of things. Admit that it does."

"Yes, it does."

"You are too thin, and you grow too tired," continued Olive. "I warn you that I have given the matter a great deal of thought, and I am prepared to meet all your objections; but don't bring

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them up now, for here we are at the hotel, and I hope you are as hungrily ready for dinner as I am."

It was indeed an exhilarating change for Mrs. Carlyle from the city house in a block to the piazza of the West Point Hotel. She took a long, luxurious nap in her room after dinner, and afterward came out on the piazza with her friends and enjoyed the charm of hills and water as one can only after a monotonous and laborious city life.

The expression of her face as she sat there in silence, her hands folded in her lap, touched Miss Bagg profoundly, and gave her one of the deep thrills of gratitude for her changed fortune which stirred her at times when her money wrought a blessing in her sight.

"How glad I am to have you here, Cousin Mary," she said affectionately.

"It is a great gift," answered the other with quiet heartiness.

"I am sorry you could not have been present at the graduating exercises, Mrs. Carlyle," added Bertha. "It was very interesting to see each man rise to receive the diploma he had been through so much to gain. When the first name was called and the cadet who stood highest in his class came forward, what a proud moment it must have been for his people! The Secretary of War said to him: 'I congratulate you less upon this triumph than upon the hard work you have been able to do to gain it.' Oh, I thought, if I could live to see my

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brother in that place, hearing such words! After General Sherman and others had spoken, the graduates, looking as happy as was consistent with their tremendous dignity, filed out, the battalion formed, and marched away toward barracks headed by the band, which played 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'Good-bye, Sweetheart.' It was thrilling. Was n't it, Olive?"

"Indeed, it was, but go on. Bertha has n't reached the most thrilling part to her."

Miss Spencer raised her dimpled white chin. "Oh, I am not so very proud of it," she declared.

"Her brother, during the ceremonies that followed, was announced to be adjutant," continued Olive.

Mrs. Carlyle looked very benevolently through her spectacles, but took this news calmly.

Her daughter laughed. "It would have been all the same to mother if I had said brigadier-general," she remarked. Then she continued mischievously: "And Bertha's dearest friend, Mr. Hemenway, was created a captain."

Mrs. Carlyle regarded Bertha pleasantly. "Captain sounds very important," she answered.

"You must n't mind anything Olive says," returned Miss Spencer calmly. "It amuses her to tease me about Mr. Hemenway, but I am twenty, and scarcely one of my friends in Ralph's class is over twenty-two. Well, anybody knows how infinitely older a woman of twenty is than a man of twenty-two."

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"Oh, that goes without saying," observed Miss Carlyle.

"Of course, for chits like Olive," continued Miss Spencer, "the attentions of these youths may be serious."

Miss Bagg here consulted her watch.

"It is time for us to be thinking about parade," she declared.

Olive laughed. "It has been time for that for Cousin Lydia all the afternoon, I am sure. I will get your bonnet, mother, and then we will go and let Cousin Lydia show you her toys. You never saw a child like to play soldiers as much as she does."

"I like to go in time to get the seat I prefer," said Miss Bagg seriously, "and I want you to see the whole thing, Cousin Mary."

As the quartette sauntered across from the hotel, the camp looked very picturesque with its perfectly aligned tents facing the four broad company streets, the green parade ground before the camp, and the whole surrounded by embowering elms.

"A beautiful playground," declared Mrs. Carlyle, regarding the scene with interest.

"Yes, and look behind you, mother," said Olive. "When we first came, all the evolutions were performed on that great plain. I am sorry you will see nothing there; but now the graduates are gone and one class is away on furlough, so but two classes are here in camp until the new fourth class is ready."

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They passed the guard tent, and Mrs. Carlyle looked curiously at a cadet sentinel marching up and down.

"Why, that is Mr. Bradley," said Olive to Bertha. "I never dare look at a man when he is on duty for fear I shall get him put in confinement for something or other. I think it is a shame for a first-class man to have to do guard duty."

"So it is; but they won't have to after the plebes are taken into the battalion. They are so short of men now."

"Rather monotonous business for the young gentlemen, I suppose," remarked Mrs. Carlyle.

"It is all monotonous for them," said Bertha. "Everything that looks so interesting to us is a hackneyed story to them. There is no respite from the iron rule and discipline and attention to details that make up their life. Well, yes, there is some respite to my class this summer, I admit. They have some privileges and pleasure, but they've a hard winter before them."

"You identify yourself with them, do you?"

"Yes, indeed. I entered with them. I was a plebe with them and suffered like a plebe, and I have gone right on. I shall graduate next June. Miss Bagg is taking a great deal of care of the candidates that have been examined the last few days. Her heart is over there in barracks at the present moment, although you would n't suspect it."

Miss Lydia sighed. "Those poor boys! Let us not think about them now. Sit here, Cousin

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Mary," — indicating one of the front row of seats facing the parade ground.

Spectators in twos and threes began approaching camp from all directions. Mrs. Carlyle observed a cadet in a plumed hat with a crimson sash across his breast, who advanced from one of the cleanly swept company streets.

"That is one of my class," said Bertha; "Mr. Le Roy."

At the same moment the sentinel near the guard-tent shouted: —

"Turn out, the guard. The officer of the day."

The young officer saluted.

"Never mind the guard," responded the sentinel.

"That always seems so needless," laughed Olive.

"Nothing that they do is needless," said Miss Bagg seriously. "I used to think it all looked like a play, but Colonel Mackenzie has made me understand that it is all business."

The young officer of the day advanced to the sentinel, who immediately saluted his superior, and, the plumed cadet speaking to him, he presented arms as he replied.

"There," said Bertha, "those two men that you see are both first-class men, yet one must be so subordinate to the other simply because of the relative position they hold to-day. If that sentry should omit one respectful detail from his manner, it would be Mr. Le Roy's duty to report him."

"What are they talking about, do you sup-

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pose?" inquired Mrs. Carlyle, watching the two cadets.

"They are not talking," replied Miss Spencer with a smile. "Mr. Barlow is giving Mr. Le Roy an official account of all that has happened to him since he last reported. Oh, it is all business. Mr. Barlow is *thinking* that it is high time for a man of his dignity to be relieved if the young ladies are beginning to gather for parade, but he will reserve his complaints for an unofficial ear."

Cadets in immaculately fresh duck trousers began hastening up from the tents and along the lines of seats in search of their friends, bearing about them the refreshing suggestion of frequent and recent "tubbing," which inasmuch as it is obvious in his appearance at every hour of the day, distinguishes the West-Pointer from his average American brother.

Many masculine eyes roved toward Bertha and Olive, but one of the girls was on each side of a strange lady in spectacles, and seemed engrossed with her.

"What pretty uniforms!" said Mrs. Carlyle. "But they 're not alike. Some have gold braid on their sleeves."

"Those are the cadet officers," explained Olive. "Those stripes are of far higher value than mere gold, I assure you. Cousin Lydia will let you join her in her study of chevrons. She learns every morning what the different bars mean, and forgets by evening."

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"I sha'n't again," returned Miss Bagg seriously, "for last night at the dance Ralph told them to me once more and I wrote them down."

"Oh, that is what Ralph and you were about, sitting off in a corner," said Bertha. "You have to thank Mr. Le Roy for that. He persuaded Ralph to give up one of his dances with me."

"I like Mr. Le Roy very much, anyway," returned Lydia. "He is always so obliging about telling me things."

The girls exchanged an amused glance. They had observed that the cadet-lieutenant good-naturedly told Miss Bagg what she wished to hear. Lydia was so evidently inclined to idealize the cadet's life that Mr. Le Roy did not, like some of the others, call the good woman's attention to its seamy side, but romanced a little when such a course was conducive to her peace of mind.

"As a practical housekeeper," observed Mrs. Carlyle, "I am impressed with the fact that all those white trousers must go to the laundry."

"Yes, indeed," answered Miss Bagg, "and as a cadet must always be spotless, one man frequently wears three pairs a day."

"How many do they have, then, for pity's sake?"

"Twenty, thirty, forty pairs apiece. Yes, indeed," announced Miss Bagg triumphantly, as though she felt the fact to be a matter of personal pride.

"Now Cousin Lydia is started on her statis-

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tics," said Olive. "She has them at her fingers' ends."

"My tongue's end, my dear."

"Miss Bagg is delightful," declared Bertha. "She is penetrating enough to appreciate these youths. The only trouble is, she is apt to permit them to see that she approves of them, and that I find unwise. It is n't wholesome."

"Just look at a group of them when they are laughing, Mary," said Miss Bagg, wholly unmoved by the girls' comments. "Their teeth are so fine. It is interesting to think they must be so perfect physically and so strong mentally, just as Mr. Van Kirk is, you know."

"That is it," remarked Olive. "Cousin Lydia considers every one of these young men a future Max Van Kirk. Any one of them can resign from the army later and ask her for a position and get it. Here comes one of the perfect beings now," — as Mr. Spencer advanced, the unbroken crease down the front of his trousers giving apparent substantiality to the rumor that the manner of assuming these immaculate garments is to jump into them from a table.

Mrs. Carlyle looked at him benignly as he was introduced to her, and his presence seemed to break the invisible ice which had protected the party from its usual assault of admirers.

Gray coats began to gather about Bertha and Olive, the former of whom had already gained the reputation of being the most popular girl at the

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post. A number of names were repeated to Mrs. Carlyle, a number of dandified and scrupulously brushed heads were bared in her honor, and a torrent of light chatter and laughter began to flow. Mr. Hemenway was late, and had time only for a word with Miss Spencer before the summons called the men back to camp.

Mrs. Carlyle, under Miss Bagg's instruction, looked down the clean-swept streets and observed the preparations for parade. Hats were brushed, white gloves drawn on. Cadet officers, slipping one end of their long crimson sashes over a wooden peg, walked to the full length of the soft silk, and then gravely began turning around and around, "winding themselves up," as Miss Lydia said, until the requisite length was left to tie and fall at the back of the hip. These officers, with their dress hats adorned with tall plumes of cock feathers, their snowy breast-belts, shining buckles and swords, crimson sashes, and rich gold chevrons added to the regular white and bell-buttoned gray of the cadet, were gorgeous beings.

The rows of seats were now filled with spectators. Carriages which had brought visitors from a distance waited along the avenues. Men in yachting costume, having anchored their craft in the river below, were present with their parties. Evidently Miss Lydia was only one of many who were alive to the fascination of dress parade at West Point.

Mrs. Carlyle turned around to look at the

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mountains against the afternoon sky. The silent beauty of their ever-changing lights and shadows was something she could not turn her back upon for long at a time.

"Here comes a band," she said, "and a very gay one."

"Yes, it is a perfect afternoon, and the drum-major has on his go-to-meeting hat," replied Bertha, also turning. "You should see his feathers when the weather is threatening. They look as though they might have been sent as a delicate attention from Job's turkey."

The companies were forming in the four streets of camp, and cadet officers were inspecting the arms of their men to see if a speck of dust or rust on a rifle bore witness to its owner's carelessness. The band was in its place. An artillery officer in full dress, whom the girls recognized as Mr. Long, took his position near them with his back to the spectators, and folded his arms.

"It is the first time he has received the parade," said Bertha with interest. "There comes Ralph," — as the adjutant and the sergeant-major left the company street and took their stand in front of one of the tents.

Spencer, looking straight before him, lifted one white-gloved hand. The bugles in response sounded the adjutant's call, then the band broke into an inspiring march. The cadets emerged from the streets and ranged themselves in line.

The drum-major convoyed his gay company up

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and down the green, the music discoursing in lively fashion. Returned to their places, the bugles sounded the retreat, the sunset gun waked the echoes, and far across the plain where the stars and stripes had floated, the flag was lowered as promptly as though what Bertha gravely stated was indeed the case, namely, that the cannon-ball had severed the rope.

This ceremony over, the adjutant gave his several orders and, advancing up the path with the military haste which appears to belong to his office, saluted the officer in charge with his bright sword.

"Sir, the parade is formed," he announced, in the strong and clear voice which had helped to make him the successful candidate for his important and showy position.

"Take your post, sir," answered the officer; then, while Spencer continued his quick march up the path and took his stand facing the battalion, the long line of cadets executed the manual of arms with wonderful precision and unanimity of movement in response to Long's orders.

It was an interesting performance. Mrs. Carlyle watched the swift, clicking, kaleidoscopic changes with sufficiently pleased attention to suit even Miss Bagg.

"What a fine training!" she said.

"Yes," answered Lydia, "and besides all this they must ride and dance and swim and fence to perfection. Then you should hear a description of

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their studies. It makes one's head ache to think of what those poor fellows must master."

Mrs. Carlyle nodded. "It behooves us to respect an army officer, does n't it? These young men are n't all so handsome as your brother, my dear," she added, turning to Bertha, "but the plainest of them look distinguished with their clean-shaven faces and fine bearing. There goes Mr. Spencer back again."

The adjutant paused midway of the parade-ground to read the orders to the now motionless cadets. In the midst of the announcements, given volubly in a monotonous tone, Bertha started.

"What did he say?" she exclaimed. "I think he said Cadet Hemenway, officer of the day."

She looked in resentful dismay at the young captain standing immobile, with drawn sword, in front of his company. "I was going with him to the hop to-morrow night," she added, aggrieved.

"Too bad," murmured Olive. "Now you must notice this, mother; it is the prettiest part of parade, I think."

The adjutant marched down the path until directly in front of the battalion he faced about, and the other cadet officers from either side approached and faced in line with him. Their gay uniforms were effective thus conjoined. With one unanimous movement their sword-points rose to the scabbard, then exactly simultaneously fell into the sheaths.

"Forward, guide centre, march," ordered the

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adjutant; the line swayed forward, and as the first step was taken the music again burst forth.

The officers advanced until they stood before Lieutenant Long. Here they paused suddenly. As it was the tactical officer's first official appearance, instead of the usual salute the cadets removed their plumed hats and stood a moment uncovered, until, Long acknowledging the courtesy, the line broke. The bayonets of the four companies were soon glittering in a retreat down the streets, and the cadet officers followed them.

"Now they all range themselves in another line at the back of camp," explained Bertha, "and Ralph will read the delinquencies for the last twenty-four hours out of what they call the 'skin-book.' The cadets call reports 'skins.' Well, was n't it pretty? Do you blame Miss Bagg for liking her playthings?"

"No, indeed. It is very entertaining."

"Now I want you to see the other end of this thing, Cousin Mary," said Lydia seriously.

"Yes," added Olive, smiling. "Cousin Lydia has a painful duty to perform every day about this time. There is a horrible fascination for her in the experiences of those poor candidates. Bertha and I will go to the hotel and wait for you."

Miss Bagg and her friend walked across the cavalry plain in the direction of the barracks. There in the stone-paved area of the long gray building was a motley gathering of all sorts and conditions of men, all at present on a dead level of compan-

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ionship in the misery which attends the aspirant to admittance at the National Academy. The daily examinations were not quite finished, yet notwithstanding there was a preliminary course of training of the raw recruits going on, unpleasant enough to console somewhat those whose hopes of entering for the four years' campaign would shortly be crushed.

Miss Bagg led her companion along the walk on the west side of the Academic Building to a position where they could see the columns of patiently marching youths, who were being sharply directed by cadet corporals detailed for the purpose of drilling them.

There were the sons of rich men and the sons of poor men; the boy who had been nurtured in the midst of symphony concerts and Browning clubs and the child of the Texan ranger; the graduate of an important university and the young man who had hungrily picked up an education where and how he could, driving a horse-car for a season in order to pay his expenses to the shrine of his high hopes. When such a one as the latter specimen, after stretching every nerve, fails of admission to the academy, it furnishes one of a variety of little tragedies, the details of which are sufficiently touching, and happy those penniless and despairing victims who find in the superintendent of the institution a friend in need. The recording angel will have that to show at the last day which is perhaps little suspected by the friends of the

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commander under whose high authority this particular awkward squad was pacing the old flagstones which have felt the pressure of so many weary feet.

The marchers, despite their sober faces, presented a ludicrous appearance. Coats manufactured by the most shining light among New York tailors presented but little better appearance than the home-made article of the far-westerner. It might have brought tears to the eyes of the owners of celebrated names inside those collars to see the utter misfit into which their *chefs d'œuvres* passed, owing to the strained and unnatural position the wearers were compelled to adopt. To aid this forcing back of the shoulders, the little finger of each hand was pressed to the seam of the trousers, palms turned to the front and thumbs out. In this posture and this only might these "plebes" walk for the next three months, and should one forget himself for a moment he would be reminded of the omission in no very gentle manner by some cadet who had traveled the road before him.

Back and forth, back and forth, trudged the oddly assorted men in derby hats, straw hats, sombreros, all shading faces of varying expressions of earnestness and endurance, led on by the sharp "Hep — Hep" of the stern cadet corporals, who one little year ago had stood in their places, but now ruled the new-comers with a rod of iron. The sharp notes of the fife and the roll of the drum announced that the cadets were marching from camp on their way to supper.

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Miss Bagg led her friend to the southern corner of the Academic Building, where they could look through to the street and see the well-drilled companies pass by. When the last row of gray blouses had wheeled toward Mess Hall, the corporals in the barracks area began marching their charges toward the same haven. The fierce tones in which some of these yearlings hurled orders at one and another luckless wight whose chin or shoulders aroused their displeasure, and the scowling, savage looks with which they pointed their words, strained somewhat Miss Bagg's utter loyalty to the wearers of the gray.

"I suppose they are very hungry and tired themselves, poor things," she murmured, in extenuation.

Meanwhile the candidates strode by, coats hanging loosely over their shoulder-blades, chins cramped in, thumbs turned out, their faces, after the difficult examinations of the day, expressing variously sullen endurance, fatigue, determination, discouragement, anxiety, and fear. When one hardy or jovial or over-tired spirit ventured to smile, how quickly a vigilant corporal, in his own words, "jumped on him."

An angry face was thrust in his. "Wipe that smile off your face and put it in your pocket, sir! *What* do you mean by smiling in ranks?" etc., etc.

The culprit, having learned that questions from corporals were not intended to elicit answers,

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maintained a crimson silence, and the "Hep — Hep" proceeded.

Miss Bagg and her friend watched the passage of the martyrs.

"All I can think of," said Mrs. Carlyle, "is a gang of prisoners being marched off to Siberia. They look so miserable. No wonder that, as Miss Spencer told me, the cadets' name for them is 'beasts.'"

"Mr. Le Roy explained to me," said Miss Bagg, deprecatingly, "that that was a sort of pet name."

The two ladies came out to the street in time to see the last of the tired company stumble over their own feet into Mess Hall. The corporals remained outside, and, the door safely closed, they slapped their legs and doubled up with infectious laughter, which suited their youthful faces much better than the fierce scowls with which they had performed their work.

At nineteen or twenty the risibles are easily moved, and even though the yearling at the Military Academy be deeply impressed with all he has himself endured and attained, his dignity is not always proof against the antics of the "cit" during the latter's initiation into his new life.

"Well, it is a toughening process," remarked Mrs. Carlyle, as the two spectators turned their faces hotelward.

"Yes; Mr. Van Kirk went through it," answered Lydia. "What man hath done, man can

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do." She needed to keep her courage up, for various dark and disquieting rumors of the woes of new cadets reached her ears, and sometimes the memory of a pale face haunted her after she had sought her pillow, and she felt moved by a tender sympathy which doubtless the pale-faced one's mother would have thanked her for, though it was not likely to do much practical good.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CONCERT IN CAMP.

"I CAN'T get out of it," said Hemenway dejectedly. "I thought at first I might make an exchange, but it is no use."

It was evening. A concert was in progress in camp. Far away the fireflies hung and shimmered above the plain as though they might have fallen from among the thick stars of heaven. The tree-tops waved in a murmuring breeze, and the strings of violin and 'cello gave forth the soothing strains of Barnby's "Sweet and Low."

Vague gleams of white showed here and there in the dim light, revealing the whereabouts of a cadet and his fair companion.

Bertha and her escort had withdrawn to the outskirts of the parade ground, where Hemenway had placed seats under a tree.

"Did you think I was going to blame you for it?" she asked.

"I thought it rather more than likely," he returned.

Bertha gave a mischievous little laugh. "Oh, I am not so unjust as that. You stood there looking so stern and motionless, listening to your fate — 'Officer of the day, Cadet Hemenway!'

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'Yours not to make reply,
Yours not to question why,'

and so forth."

"I should think not," remarked her companion. "I gave up questioning why, three years ago; but that does n't alter the fact that you are going away now in a few days, and that after to-morrow evening perhaps I cannot get another one of your hops. Mentioning the Dutch hotel would have been but a slight outlet for my feelings when Ralph fired that off. I had calculated on one more free day."

"Be calm," returned Bertha graciously. "I must break it to you gently that we are not going so soon as I expected, on account of Miss Bagg's illness."

In Mr. Hemenway's countenance satisfaction, surprise, and incredulity were about equally blended. He had seen Miss Bagg and Mrs. Carlyle a few minutes ago on one of the iron seats.

Bertha amused herself with his expression a moment, then continued: "Miss Bagg has one of the severest cases of cadet fever ever known at the post."

"Good for Miss Bagg!" exclaimed Hemenway heartily.

"If you were gallant, you would congratulate yourself."

"Oh, it is the best thing in the world for me, of course," responded the young man hastily; "and won't you say you are a little glad, too, Miss Baby?" he added in a different tone.

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"If you call me by that name I shall not disclose any of my sentiments," she answered uncompromisingly.

"You don't object when Ralph uses it."

"Of course not."

"I fail to see any 'of course' about it."

"Why, you particularly dull young person! Is that possible? Then I will enlighten you. I adore Ralph. He may call me anything he pleases."

This was unanswerable. Those of the young captain's company who considered him a martinet would doubtless have been gratified to see him now, meekly dumb before the small person in white, who regarded the tips of her red shoes demurely.

"Ralph is getting spoony about Miss Carlyle," he announced at length. "It is a pity you should waste your adoration on him."

"How well he has chosen his confidant!" remarked Miss Spencer severely.

"He has n't confided in me. I see it. That is all."

Bertha laughed appreciatively. "Oh, you are such a penetrating man!"

"No, I'm not, and I know it; but I have a fellow-feeling for him, confound it!"

"Well, upon my word." Miss Spencer raised her eyebrows. "How complimented *she* must feel, whoever she is!"

"She does n't care whether she is complimented

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or not. She has n't any feelings," was the pessimistic response.

"So that is your ideal, is it, — a girl without any feelings. Well, you have odd taste." Then, as the orchestra began another number: "How very pretty that dear old 'Wert thou in the cauld blast' sounds. It is always so heartfelt and touching." Here the girl began to sing softly with the plaintive violins:

"'My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee.'

"Oh, if anybody sang such words to me and I had n't heard them murdered a hundred times, I should say" —

"What?"

"Why, I should say, 'You *may* shelter me, of course. I prefer your plaidie to anybody else's.'"

"I can't sing — I can't even talk — when I want to," declared Mr. Hemenway dejectedly.

"There is no necessity for you to do so, you know," responded Bertha consolingly, "for your ideal has n't any feelings, and such fine sentiment would be thrown away upon her. What an absurd thing for them to play, anyway, this hot night!" she added hastily, owing to certain alarming symptoms of returning courage in her companion. "The thought of a plaidie is insufferable. I brought my fan in the hope of raising a cauld blast with it. Do you know, you nearly ruined this fan at the last german? These stiff feathers were all in little wisps. You always use a fan as though it were a sabre, any way, but I happened to

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look out of the window to-day, and I saw a hen dressing her feathers. She drew each one through her beak, you know, and smoothed it all out, and I suddenly had a bright thought, and ran and got my fan and did the same thing, — drew each feather between my lips, this way. Don't you think I was clever? You can feel how smooth it is."

"I know you are clever," returned Hemenway, with a short laugh.

"I am glad you appreciate me. Part of my cleverness lies in the fact that I can learn something of everybody, — even a hen, which is admittedly the stupidest creature in existence."

"Then you own there is one object in the world stupider than I am."

"Oh, Mr. Hemenway, — the august Osborn! Number one in his class all last year! Published in the annals of the Army Register as a star cadet! Asks me now if he has more brains than a hen!" Bertha shook her head. "This weak hankering after praise pains me in one so young."

"Say, I wish you would stop one minute, you know," protested her companion plaintively.

"I won't say another word all the evening, if you wish it. Why, excuse me. I might have known you wanted to enjoy the music; I will be silent henceforth." Miss Spencer turned so as more nearly to face the knot of players in the middle of the parade ground.

"Miss Bab — Bertha," — Mr. Hemenway turned toward her, — "your voice is all the music I want,

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and you know it. Tell me," he asked tenderly, "if you learn something of everybody, what do I teach you?"

She turned her head, and looked into the eyes so near her.

"Patience," she answered.

The prompt reply was delivered so demurely, with such a gentle accent, that some seconds passed before the blood crept stingingly into the young man's ears.

The worm will turn, likewise the individual at the other extreme of the scale of being, — the cadet officer.

Hemenway made some exclamation, and a soft laugh rippled from his companion's lips.

"I should think you might learn patience, if it is to be taught by example," he retorted at last. "Job was n't a circumstance to me; but it is over, — you can jeer at somebody else after this."

"Oh, is that you, Babe? Say, where is Miss Carlyle?" Mr. Spencer strode out of the shadows and stood before them, speaking anxiously.

"You ought to know," returned his sister.

"Well, I don't. I was detained."

"Of course. What a lifetime of detentions you have endured. Do you know people are beginning to ask why you are like Mr. Lenox?"

"That can be answered briefly. I 'm not like Lenox," returned Mr. Spencer, not relishing comparison with his predecessor in office.

"Yes, you are, my dear, for you are the late adjutant."

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"Now, don't stop to get off grinds on me. Where is Miss Carlyle?"

"With somebody that knows how to take care of her, I hope. She is not alone, you may be sure, so just sit down here. Mr. Hemenway is unable to stay any longer and I need you."

"Why, yes — no — I — I have n't the least intention of going away," stammered that gentleman.

"Is that all right, Babe?" queried her brother, not understanding, but yearning to be off and pour forth his apologies where they belonged.

"Why, yes, if Mr. Hemenway is quite sure what he wants to do. This whiffling habit of mind is very deplorable."

Bertha half repressed another laugh, and her brother departed hurriedly.

"Have n't you been absurdly cross?" she asked her companion coaxingly. "Here, fan me. Now remember, you 're not cutting off heads in the riding-hall. Deal gently with my plumage."

Hemenway took the fan and waved it in silence.

"Let us be the best of friends to-night," she continued, "for as you can't take me to the hop to-morrow night you may as well make a complete thing of it and stay away from me all day. As I am to remain at the Point so much longer, there is danger of our growing tired of one another."

Meanwhile Mr. Spencer was having ill success in his search for Olive. The latter, expecting every minute that he would come for her, had re-

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fused to allow her mother and Miss Bagg to wait longer with her on the hotel piazza, and for some time after they had sauntered away toward camp, Olive remained sitting on the west side of the house, enjoying the distant music and the suggestive harmony of her own thoughts. These did not concern her expected escort to the concert, nor any other of the young men who had entertained her of late with their flattering attentions.

"I am afraid I am getting into a habit of thinking of Max," she admitted to herself.

It was twilight. The sky was still flushed from the sun's descent, and the mountains loomed darkly against it. The fiery color, half-veiled by elm-branches, shed a last glow upon the broad river, and the dreamy music lent enchantment to the scene. Olive was tempted on to self-communing.

She looked back to the days after Cousin Jotham's dinner, when she found it so amusing to weave romances with Max for the central character. Ida at that time had served as good a purpose as any one to enact the rôle of heroine. By some subtle change of sentiment in the dreamer of these dreams, Mrs. Fuller soon ceased to fit the part. Of course Olive did not care whom Mr. Van Kirk married, so long as his choice was a suitable person; but Ida she thought snobbish and calculating. The widow repelled her. She regretted to believe that Ida was Max's fate.

Then came a time when she began to resent the fact that as soon as she was alone Max's image

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should obtrude itself. She was tired of considering him in all his various possibilities. Then she came to West Point, and lo! it was his environment that again confronted her. The barracks rose before her as a place where Max had lived. He had recited in the Academic Building, eaten in Mess Hall, attended concerts at the Library.

From thinking of him as anybody's hero, he had come to be an abstraction so far as women were concerned. Her persistent thoughts wove no more romances. The other day at the review his reception of her mention of Ida Fuller had given her a sudden throb of triumph. His subsequent remark had caused her a sudden fear, but the fear had been followed by a reaction. Ever since that afternoon, there had been cherished in a secret warm corner of Olive's heart the suggestion more of Van Kirk's tone than of his words. The sweetest hope found gradually a home in that hidden nook. Sometimes Olive felt with a joyous pang that it was growing; without nurture, without encouragement, she felt that it was still obstinately and hardily growing. She did not examine it, she looked away. That was not difficult to do, for she was scarcely ever alone; yet with whomsoever she was, whatever words her lips might speak, she was conscious always of this "still thing growing," a secret source of unfailing joy.

She grew frightened as she sat here now so long silent in the gathering shadows. The little hope was importunate of her attention, and its pulsing life set her whole heart to beating.

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"I wish Mr. Spencer would come," she murmured, and starting up she walked aimlessly to the corner of the house and around toward the door. A man was quickly ascending the steps. Sure that it was the delinquent, she hurried forward, and in an instant confronted — not cadet-gray, but tweeds.

A hand seized hers. "Olive."

"Max."

They said no more for a half a minute, and their hands clung together.

"Has my luck changed, I wonder?" he said at length.

Miss Carlyle's breath came quick. She was afraid to speak.

"To come upon you in this way," he continued. "Are you alone? What does it mean?"

"It means that my people left me a little while ago expecting that Mr. Spencer would be here at once to take me to the concert," answered Olive, recovering her senses sufficiently to withdraw her hand and speak conventionally. "I can't think what has happened to him."

"Some little obstacle in the way of confinement, perhaps. At all events, I am as grateful to him as though he had purposely absented himself. I saw there was a concert in progress, but thought I would just take a look on the piazzas first. Seriously, Olive, to find you here is the first gift fortune has bestowed upon me in many moons. May I take you over to the camp?"

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"Yes, I think I need n't wait any longer," answered Miss Carlyle, and from her tone no one could have guessed how the growing hope was singing.

They went down the steps together, and thus it happened that when Mr. Spencer raced madly up the same steps five minutes later, no one about the hotel was able to produce Miss Carlyle.

His unavoidable detention this time had been the combination of a tea and a new girl with a vivacious tongue, whose white hand was very familiar with the strings of a banjo. These had beguiled him beyond the intended hour, and his conscious guilt, added to his admiration for Miss Carlyle, made him extremely warm in mind and body when it was proved that he must extend his quest into camp.

He did not find her there, either, for Olive and Van Kirk were wandering to and fro in the deep shadow of spreading trees at a little distance from the groups of listeners.

The orchestra was now performing bits from Wagner and introducing convenient cadences, of which it is to be hoped, in the interests of the imperial composer's eternal happiness, that he was unaware; but the music gave Miss Carlyle and her companion an excuse for silence, which they maintained for some minutes.

At last Max spoke. "Why don't you ask me why I am up here so soon again?"

"I do not need that you should give any reason."

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"I saw that it would be of no use to wait till you sent for me. I knew you were surrounded by bell-buttons and had an embarrassment of riches in the way of attention."

Olive smiled. "You saw that just now, I am sure."

"Oh, well, that was a slip of some kind for my especial benefit. I suppose it was rather presuming in me to assume charge of you and carry you off, but there will be other evenings for Spencer, and perhaps no others for me."

"I find you rather mysterious to-night, Mr. Van Kirk. In fact you are something of an enigma to me anyway. Why are n't you a happier man?"

"So I have been wearing my heart on my sleeve, have I?"

"I did not think," continued Olive, "that you were going to take events so hard. You seemed jolly enough over it all at first. But now every little while I catch a glimpse of your discontent. Do you wish you were back in the army?"

"I don't know."

"Do you wish you were a millionaire?"

"No, with a very large N."

"Dear me. He even despises money," said the girl, softly smiling.

"There is just one thing in the world that I want, Olive," continued Van Kirk slowly and thoughtfully, "and that a woman can give me."

The speaker felt the faintest flutter of the hand resting on his arm, but received no answer.

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"If I do not get it" — a pause — "life will not be worth living."

His words thrilled his companion from head to foot. The radiant hope was singing so loudly in her ears that the other music seemed far away. For the first time she turned herself fully and blissfully to meet life's gracious possibilities face to face. Her eyes filled with light and her heart with the might of her joy.

She dared not speak — yet; neither did she wish to do so. With her hero beside her in the solemn, beautiful night, she would not hasten the climax of that supreme moment which should launch them both into eternity of happiness. Like one in a dream, she leaned lightly on his arm as they slowly passed on. The moment, so joyfully long to her in its wealth of experience, passed. Van Kirk spoke again: —

"I have written to this woman," he said. "Very soon I shall know the worst — or the best. I simply could n't stand the waiting down there alone. I never had a sister, Olive. It is so strangely sweet to speak to a woman, tender-hearted, honest, who has a kindly feeling for me and will be lenient to my egotism. I did n't realize you were a woman, upon my word, until that last evening in New York, when you spoke your mind to me concerning the picture. I never realized before how tall you were, how altogether impressive."

He waited a moment for a response; then he

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felt suddenly that his companion was shaking with laughter.

"It was comical," he continued. "You nearly took my breath away."

Still Olive laughed. Max thought it a little strange that she should be so amused, but he smiled in sympathy.

"It does seem so absurd as I look back upon it to think I should have been so vexed," she said at last, shivering, and quickly wiping her eyes. "It is odd that such a childish performance should have impressed you with a sense of my dignity. Do you know, I am being guilty of a bit of thoughtlessness now," she added, as seriously as her short breath would permit. "If Mr. Spencer is searching for me, he has probably found mother and succeeded in frightening her completely. Let us go and explain my non-appearance. She is somewhere over there on one of those seats."

"I see," replied Van Kirk resignedly, "you are weary of the society of a 'cit' who talks about his own woes, when you might have the company of one of these light hearted and headed cadets."

They turned and moved toward the auditors.

"Cadets are charming," declared Olive, "and no more light-headed than the rest of us; besides, I like light-headed people. I 'm not ready for the serious side of life. Hear that wind in the trees," she added, as the music ceased. "I always like that murmur. Don't you?"

"Yes. Many a night, when I have been on

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guard yonder by Fort Clinton, it has made the time seem less weary," replied her companion.

"And I dare say you used to compose sonnets by the half-dozen. Did n't you, now?"

"I never was much given to rhymes. How you hurry, Olive!"

"Conscience is driving me."

"Oh, Cousin Mary is n't so nervous as all that."

"Yes, she is. If Mr. Spencer tells her I am not at the hotel, she will imagine I have drowned myself. What an attractive place to drown one's self, by the way! So clean and picturesque! The only trouble would be to choose the prettiest of the hundreds of eligible spots from which to take a lover's leap."

"Wait for the lover before you talk about that."

"How do you know I have n't one, pray?"

"I — well, I don't know, of course."

"I should say you could scarcely be sure."

Olive laughed as she talked in a way not usual with her, — rather a silly way Max would have thought it in another woman.

"When the man appears," he said seriously, "whom you care for, Olive, the only lover's leap you need take will be straight into his arms, for he will be the happiest man on earth."

He felt her hand tighten on his arm.

"Very neatly said, Mr. Van Kirk," she replied saucily, "but a trifle exaggerated. How can the great unknown be happier than you will be when

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that mysterious being gives you the one thing you crave on earth?" The soft laughter rippled forth again, and Van Kirk look graver then before.

"You give me a salutary lesson, Olive," he said shortly. "I had no right to bore you."

They had now reached the rows of seats, and Miss Carlyle's eager eyes quickly sought out the white zephyr covering she had seen her mother throw over her hair as she left the hotel. Dropping Van Kirk's arm and taking a hasty step forward, she flung her arms about her mother's neck and clasped her hands together.

Mrs. Carlyle started, and looked around as well as she could in the rigid embrace. "Olive, child, there you are at last. I was just wondering if I ought to go in search of you. Mr. Spencer was here a minute ago in a great state of mind."

"Yes, we missed each other. Max is here. He brought me."

Miss Bagg turned alertly and, reaching out her hand, welcomed the new arrival warmly.

"You will have to come around here to shake hands with me, Max," said Mrs. Carlyle. "Olive has me in a vise."

"A lovely vise," returned Van Kirk, coming obediently around the end of the seat and taking the offered hand. "You see I have defrauded Olive of the society of one of her admirers tonight, and so I am bound to throw in a compliment wherever I see the opportunity, even if it leads me into paradox. The bad penny soon returns, you see, Miss Bagg."

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"I sha'n't like it at all if you don't come often," returned Lydia. "We have been having such a good time, — all except the candidates."

Then she went on to rehearse to Max all she had seen and heard, while Olive, thankful for her volubility, clung to her mother as to an anchor of safety. Her heart ached so heavily from the leaden weight of that mute, slain hope, which in its vigor had made her whole being light and joyous.

Mr. Spencer came charging back up the path, still on his frantic quest. He paused with a jerk as he was passing her.

"Miss Carlyle!" he exclaimed, and lifted his cap.

She stemmed the tide of glib explanation and apology into which he immediately plunged.

"Don't say another word," she interrupted sweetly. "I feel that I owe you quite as much of an apology as you do me. My cousin arrived from New York, and I, seeing that you were detained, came over here with him, not realizing how much annoyance I might cause you by not giving you a few minutes' more grace."

"Well, by George! she is the sweetest girl I ever saw in my life!" thought the much agitated adjutant, with a glow of gratitude such as young women might elicit much oftener than they do, if they would take the sensitiveness out of their self-love.

Miss Carlyle was not deserving of credit in the present instance. If Ralph Spencer had but

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known it, while she was smiling upon him so graciously he seemed to her to be but the moving figure in a dream. His offense appealed to her consciousness no more than would a pin-prick to the man who had just received a mortal wound.

He remained beside her after greeting Van Kirk.

"You won't find me very talkative, I am afraid," she said after a minute. "Your music is so good here, and even if it were much less so, the surroundings idealize it. I like to listen."

"Olive, you are cold," declared her mother, upon whose breast the girl's hands were still tightly clasped. "I distinctly felt you shiver. I told you, dear, that cobweb dress was not enough. Night air is night air, even in June. I want you to come back with me to the hotel," she added, in the coaxing tone of a parent who expects a parley.

Miss Carlyle looked up at the adjutant. "Do you always mind your mother, Mr. Spencer?" she asked.

"I haven't had a chance for a good while, you know. This stepmother of mine — it is the grimmest sarcasm to call her Alma Mater — has about absorbed my capacity for obeying for a few years."

"She will be minded, will she?" asked Mrs. Carlyle, endeavoring to unlock Olive's cold hands. "What does she do, if you rebel? Tell me, so I can try it with my daughter."

"Puts us in 'con,' usually," laughed Spencer.

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"That is confinement, mother," explained Olive.

"Well, I will adopt the idea right away. Your hands feel as though it were January."

"Won't it do to get a wrap, or something?" suggested Ralph.

"No," replied Mrs. Carlyle decidedly. "I prefer to have her go in, and I hope she will learn wisdom by experience."

"Well, good-night, then, Max," said Olive, "the fiat has gone forth. You will take care of Cousin Lydia."

Ralph Spencer accompanied the ladies up to the hotel, followed by the strains of the Lorelei.

"Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten
Das ich so traurig bin."

"It occurs to me that your cousin must have endured some punning on his name when he was a cadet," said Spencer, as they walked on. "'Max' means with us a successful recitation or performance of any kind."

"Well, that was a suitable name for him, I imagine," replied Olive. "I believe that he stood very well in his class."

"When do those strange boys, the new-comers, join the cadets in camp?" asked Mrs. Carlyle.

"In a short time, a week, perhaps," replied Spencer. "I believe the examinations ended today. The sooner they come the better for us; for our limits have been changed for their accommodation. We are not allowed to walk over there while they are in barracks."

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"Why?"

"Oh, we might molest them," replied the young fellow, smiling. "Of course we should n't, you know, but we might."

"Is there hazing here?"

"Your voice sounds horrified, Mrs. Carlyle. How glad I am to belong to the graduating class. The giddy yearlings do most of whatever hazing is done. That sort of thing is leagues below the dignity of a first-class man, you know."

"I should hope so, indeed. Such cowardly business!"

They had reached the hedge, and Olive gave the cadet her hand, which he clasped cordially. "May I try once more, Miss Carlyle?" he said. "On Thursday evening there will be a concert on the plain in front of the superintendent's. May I see if I can redeem my character for punctuality?"

"Certainly," replied Olive. "I shall be pleased. Good-night."

She went into the house with her mother.

"I am going to give you a good rubbing," said the latter, when they had reached their room.

"Indeed, I don't need it, dear," the girl answered. "I shall be quite warm now; but I am tired. This life in the outdoor air makes one sleepy; don't you think so?"

She was soon in bed, and seemed to fall asleep immediately. Her mother also retired, in order that the light might not disturb Olive. She had

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not been long in bed when she felt the girl tremble.

"I thought you were asleep, dear," she said. "What amuses you so?"

"Nothing much. I'll be asleep in a minute."

The response, although very faintly given, betrayed that it was choked with repressed tears.

Mrs. Carlyle suffered a shock of anxiety. Her mind instantly became alert. Olive had some trouble, and it was the first she had ever concealed from her mother. How the latter longed to turn and take that quiet form in her arms! but she controlled herself. She studied upon what could have occurred since she last saw Olive in her natural good spirits. Could it have been that the child felt deeply mortified by Ralph Spencer's delinquency? Impossible. Olive was too frank and sensible to brood over such a trifle. Then it was Max.

Mrs. Carlyle knit her brows there in the darkness, in the effort to think it all out and to comprehend what she could not know. She searched the past to find out how Olive regarded Van Kirk. She recalled the triumphant tone in which the girl had declared her belief that he cared nothing for Ida Fuller.

"Does she love him, and has he told her to-night something that crushes her?" wondered the mother, her heart wrung by the faint sound of quickly-caught breath on the other pillow. She remembered the cold hands that had clasped her so

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desperately, the shivering figure that had nestled close to her, there in camp, and a fervent prayer rose from the depths of her heart for help to bear this new and great trouble, — the secret grief of her child.

All at once a long-pent sob went shuddering through the form beside her. Mrs. Carlyle could refrain no longer. She turned, and gently took her daughter in her arms.

At her touch Olive's repressed tears gushed forth. She threw her arm around her mother's neck.

"Don't — don't — ask me," she sobbed.

"Not one word, my sweet one; only let me be near you." She took the little cold hand and warmed it at her own lips. She smoothed the girl's hair, and finally the sobbing lessened. The patient hand continued the soothing strokes, until at last the nervous breathing became even and Olive slept.

But the mother waked all the night and pondered. The reveille gun crashed through the still, rain-wet morning, and she raised herself and gazed into her child's face. Its beauty smote her with a sense of pathos.

"There is only weakness where I should have strength to bear your sorrows, my darling," she thought, and dried the tears that blurred her yearning gaze. "Oh, my little lamb, if the Lord loves you better than I do, we must not be anxious."

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CHAPTER XIX.

MR. VAN KIRK UNBURDENS HIMSELF.

It is to be feared that Miss Bagg's secretary did not hear every word of her descriptions after Olive said good-night.

His mind kept straying with a sense of humiliation. Olive had evidently felt the ignorant contempt of a heart-whole, inexperienced girl for his darkly hinted trouble. Youth is often cruel, and Van Kirk not only felt that Miss Carlyle had been cruel, but regretted sorely that he had given her the opportunity to show her indifference.

Her reception of him had at first been so unmistakably cordial. In his excitement and anxiety, was it any wonder that he had sought consolation from her warm, sweet womanliness? Surely their intimacy, even though it had come to exist only at spasmodic intervals of years, warranted so much.

It does not appear precisely why Mr. Van Kirk should have found justification for his confidences in the fact that he could remember himself a boy of seven, feeling rather sheepish because Olive, in a soft, white dress and unsteady kid shoes, enjoyed clinging to his finger during her first laborious and eventful promenades around the room;

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but the fact remains that, in the light of that memory, the later memory of her ironical laughter appeared to him now as especially ungrateful.

He came to himself because Miss Bagg's flow of words suddenly stopped, and some vague echo seemed to tell him that his companion had appealed to him to know if something was not awful.

"Was it? Well — a" —

"Why, I tell you, the poor fellow had scarcely anything *on*," said Lydia earnestly. "He had gone to bed, and they kept him up in that tree all night, just because his father was a general in the army and they thought he might feel a little conceited about it. I think such hazing is criminal. If I supposed any such thing would be done to any of these new plebes, I would" — She paused, to think of some sufficiently severe threat.

"I hope you are n't going to say that you would order me to sleep in camp that I might watch, for I do not believe they would let me."

"These cadets whom I know must be entirely different from the class who could do such things as that," said Lydia earnestly, "but there may be a few such spirits among them."

"It is barely possible."

"You are smiling, Mr. Van Kirk. Don't tell me that you think the subject is amusing. Now, don't."

"I was n't going to, Miss Bagg. So your visit continues to prove a success, does it? Are you glad you brought Olive Carlyle?"

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"Indeed I am. She is just the person to come here, and I enjoy seeing her receive so much notice."

"Don't you think it may be turning her head?"

"Not at all. Olive's head is n't that kind," replied Miss Lydia decidedly. "She treats them all beautifully, and is just her even self all the time, only brighter, — ever so much happier than I ever knew her before. She is a butterfly reveling in the summer."

"Only, wiser than the butterfly, she knows that the winter will come," remarked Max.

"Yes, she says she is storing up sunshine against the winter."

"Many a girl has found her fate here," said Van Kirk. "Does Olive particularly favor any of her admirers?"

"I can hardly say that. She is more with Ralph Spencer, perhaps, than any one; and I don't wonder. He is certainly one of the pleasantest objects to look upon that I ever saw, and his manner is charming, — unusually so. Yes, if I were eighteen, I am free to confess that I would not take 'no' for an answer from Ralph Spencer." Miss Bagg smiled placidly from the vantage-ground of her fifty years.

"Adjutants are usually a set of jackanapes," responded Van Kirk, so curtly that Lydia looked at him in surprise. It was most unusual for her secretary to use such a tone.

"You stay here long enough and you will see

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that Mr. Spencer is n't one," she returned. "No; he is a fine young man."

"So Olive has your blessing, has she, if she inclines in that direction?"

"Yes; they are very nice people, the Spencers; but, dear me, this is guess-work, you know. There may be nothing in it, only Olive is such a pretty girl I should think every man who sees her would lose his heart. I never saw any one so beautiful, and her self is lovelier still; that is why she wears well. She and young Spencer make a very handsome couple."

So Miss Bagg went on, innocently, her listener more and more nettled as she proceeded.

"No good ever comes of match-making, I think," he said at last.

"Bless you, I 'm not making any matches," declared Lydia, laughing. "I am only enjoying being a spectator. I am glad Olive has a mother, and that she is here. I intend to hold on to her as long as I can."

The next morning when the party gathered at breakfast, it seemed as though the rain that was blotting out all perspective in the landscape had dampened the spirits of each member.

"I am so disappointed to think you can't see guard mounting, Cousin Mary," said Miss Bagg.

"Do not worry about me at all," answered Mrs. Carlyle. "A rainy day has plenty of compensations for a person who is making a business of being lazy."

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"It never ought to rain at West Point," declared Bertha autocratically. "I dare say the heavens are weeping because I can't go to the german to-night, but I could dispense with the attention."

"You can go," remarked Olive, "as you know very well. There is little Mr. Wild, who has been using every device known to cadet ingenuity to secure you for a hop. It is surprising how, for an elderly person, you suit the yearling taste."

"Oh, he has a partner for this, of course. Anyway, I would rather not go at all unless with one of my friends. Mr. Van Kirk, why don't you ask me?"

"You compliment me. Will you take me in tweeds?"

"I dare say I shall be obliged to make over my partner to you," said Olive. "As he is your brother, perhaps you will accept him. The fact is, I waked with a headache this morning, and I may not be able to conquer it."

"It is all the weather," declared Miss Spencer, regarding her friend, whose heavy eyes corroborated her words. "Even if Olive is not able to go, Mrs. Carlyle, you must come to the hall and see what a pretty thing a military german is. After the old tarletan scarfs and all the tame figures one is so tired of, it is inspiring to pass under an avenue of crossed swords and then waltz in an officer's sash."

"Yes, with a sword held in your partner's hand, the point impaling your skirt," added Olive. "It

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gives great zest to a dance to know that you may end, like the hero of an old novel, by falling on your sword."

Mrs. Carlyle raised her eyebrows. "I think the headache is the wisest thing you could have under those circumstances, Olive," she observed.

"Oh, no; it will be too bad if she must miss one of the hops," said Lydia seriously.

Her secretary smiled at her across the table. "Which have you decided to be in your next incarnation, Miss Bagg? A cadet, or the sister of a cadet?"

As he spoke, he saw his friend Cary entering the dining-room. The latter recognized him, and immediately approached to shake hands.

"Glad you 're back again, Van Kirk, but sorry to give you such moist weather. Sha'n't I see you some time to-day?"

"Yes, indeed. Where shall I find you?"

"Let us go down to Thornton's quarters and have a smoke. I am living in camp now."

"All right. I shall be ready when you have finished breakfast."

Lieutenant Thornton's quarters were in the building known as the Old Hospital, but which deserves a more pleasantly suggestive title. From its piazza one gets a charming panoramic view of the Hudson through a succession of stone arches. Sunlighted scenes of hills, woods, water, varied craft, and curving banks by day; by night, mysterious pictures of great boats, with red, green, and

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orange lights, quietly moving up and down the river, far, far below, an electric glow lighting the water about them, and the music from their cabins coming like a faint echo to the ear.

But to-day the view must be taken on faith. As Cary and his friend sprang up the iron stair the great drenched trees across the narrow road dripped profusely. The sentry had retired into his box. The foliage of the steeply declining bank was obscured by mist. Even the clouds detailed to shower West Point seem to have absorbed the atmosphere of discipline, and do their work with military thoroughness.

Cary ushered his friend into the sanctum, half parlor, half library, of the absent lieutenant. "I believe you saw Thornton when you were here before. He has sailed for the other side and I miss him. He 's a good fellow."

There was a cheerfulness of manner, a new responsiveness about the speaker, which was very noticeable. Van Kirk looked at him curiously.

"Here, get down on this divan," continued Cary, piling up a lot of comfortable cushions, "and have a cigar."

"I am not much of a smoker, but you seem to have found a brand that agrees with you. If you will warrant the same effect upon me, I will consume a whole box."

Cary laughed as he drew up his chair. "You observe that I am a new man, don't you?" he said.

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"Are the cigars so good?" asked Van Kirk, as he took one.

"I don't know what I'm smoking these days, nor what I'm eating, nor half the time what I'm doing," answered his friend.

"Humph! You *have* changed. You must be in love."

"Lots better than that, my boy; I'm engaged. Yes, I have n't said anything about it," continued Cary, his happiness shining in his face, "but to you I don't mind. The very day after you left last week I became engaged."

"And you call that better than being in love, do you?" responded the other gruffly. "Well, I don't."

"It is a dismal enough thing to be in one condition without the other, let me tell you," remarked Cary confidentially, between the puffs of his newly lighted cigar.

"You need n't trouble yourself to give me any information of that kind," returned Van Kirk gloomily. "Experience is just as good a teacher as I want on that subject."

"Go 'way. I don't believe it," said the other, removing his cigar to gaze through half-closed lids at his friend. "I have thought ever since I first saw you that if I were a woman you were the sort of man I should fall in love with. Strong and graceful and — all that, you know."

"Oh, thanks," growled Van Kirk, "you *are* in a roseate mood."

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"Has she ever seen you on horseback?" pursued Cary. "I don't believe she has."

"Bosh," remarked his friend ungratefully. "You 're barking up the wrong tree altogether. I 'm not in love with anybody."

"You 're not?"

"No; and nobody 's in love with me."

"Well, then, there 's no harm done that I can see."

"I dare say. I 've always heard that love is blind," returned Max, "and you seem to be representing Cupid just now."

Cary's state of mind was so beatific that he felt only commiseration for his grouty visitor.

"Well, you seem inclined to be enigmatical," he said with a laugh. "At least you might have the grace to congratulate me!"

"How can I? Have I seen her?"

"No, I think not. Her name is Bruce, and she is — oh, she is perfection!"

"Well, I congratulate Miss Bruce — heartily. As for you, I give you my best wishes, and they are that you may remain in your present frame of mind and never wish yourself well out of the whole business."

Cary gazed at his friend with wide-open eyes, and emitted a long, soft whistle.

"Oho," he said deliberately. "At last I see. You have been caught."

"No, indeed. Nothing so creditable to me as that. I have pushed my head of my own accord, in spite of everything, into a noose."

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"And the knot has tightened, and now you can't get it out. I see," said Cary sympathetically. "Well," he added, "treat it like other Gordian knots, — cut it."

"Very easy to say."

"Very easy to do, if what you said is true, namely, that nobody is in love with you."

"Confound it, Cary." Max sat up irritably. "Don't you know that when a man has asked a woman to marry him — no, begged her to — and she has consented, that there is just one thing left for him to do, and that is to marry her?"

"I know that is the generally accepted notion," returned the other reluctantly. Then after a minute's dejected silence, he added: "What did she accept you for, if she did n't care for you? I 'm sorry for you, Van Kirk, but I 'm afraid that won't hold water."

The ex-lieutenant sighed. "Thereby hangs a tale; a twice-told tale to you, I dare say." He met his friend's sympathetic gaze steadily. "I suppose you know why I left the army?"

"Yes," replied Cary briefly.

"And I suppose you know I got left myself."

"Yes."

"Well, then, you have a clew to why I was accepted, have n't you?"

Cary looked thoughtful. "If it was from mercenary motives," he replied at last hopefully, "then why is n't it all plain sailing? Won't she drop you like a hot coal now?"

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Van Kirk held his cigar between two fingers and returned his friend's gaze. "I have a hope that she will," he answered slowly. "I am hound enough for that."

"Why upbraid yourself, when you are sure the lady behaved from interested motives?"

"Because I am disgusted with myself," returned the other hotly. "Why, because a woman sat a horse superbly, sang like a lark, and danced well, should I have idealized her like a schoolboy and pursued her at every opportunity, if I had n't solidity enough to stick to her through thick and thin? That is where it hurts. I hunt for the grand passion which absorbed me a little while ago, and where is it? Vanished. Instead I find only a longing to sneak out and away. I ought to be kicked."

Cary leaned back and crossed his left foot comfortably over his right knee. "It is as plain as day," he said calmly. "You have made a mistake."

His friend turned quickly, and looked at him contemptuously. "Miss Bruce is evidently going to marry an oracle," he remarked.

"Wait, my boy. You don't understand me," continued Cary, with unruffled temper. "Did you ever hear such a doctrine as that in affairs of the heart the woman chooses the man and not *vice versa?*"

"No, I can't say I have."

"It is a fact, Van Kirk, and I am a convert to it. Colonel Mackenzie first propounded the idea

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to me, and I believe it. I 've proved it, man. Now this lady had not chosen you, but your money; therefore the false flare-up in your affections caused by her apparent choice of yourself has vanished like a will-o'-the-wisp."

Max laughed. "This is too good," he ejaculated. "Who would ever have dreamed of Cary turning fanciful?"

"Fact, Van Kirk, not fancy; and more likely than not some woman has really chosen you already, and the attraction of her desires is causing half your trouble."

"Stuff — and — nonsense, Cary! Happiness has turned your head. You don't tell me you would like to believe that women are going about, setting their hearts upon men unasked, and that when a man loves he must feel that he has not taken the initiative?"

Cary nodded contentedly. "Think about it, Van Kirk. You will first endure, then pity, then embrace. See if you don't."

"Why, you old iconoclast, what are you about! I call that speech profane, and I am not in a very chivalrous state of mind, either. You might as well put men in petticoats at once."

"Oh, I don't mean endure and pity and embrace the *girl*. It is the idea. No; the women have the upper hand of us anyway, because they have absolute control of themselves, and hunting for a needle in a hay-mow is a mere bagatelle to finding that preference for yourself which is hid-

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den in some girl's heart. You might be alone for hours with the very woman who has chosen you, and the only impression you could gather from her behavior would be that if you were the last man on earth she would n't marry you."

Van Kirk looked amused. "You are so wise I am afraid of you, Cary. Any man who could find his fate under those depressing circumstances has a penetration which I can only admire with awe."

"Penetration? I did n't have a bit. Fate by a kind caprice bundled me neck and crop in the direction of my happiness, and I stumbled into it as awkwardly as I have always done everything else."

"I wish I knew how to get on the right side of fate."

"Pull yourself out of the hole you 're in, first."

"I have done all I can do," replied Max. "I may as well tell you that this lady has held to the belief that I would yet come into that fortune, and I a few days ago wrote her a letter expressly and clearly undeceiving her and offering her her freedom."

Cary smiled grimly.

Van Kirk flushed. "Yes, that 's the dastardly part of it," he admitted. "I know I 'm a hypocrite. This is a nice thing I 've been doing this morning, too," he added after a little. "Of course, if the engagement is broken off, my talking it over this way won't matter. There is but one other person who knows of the bond, and you never saw

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or heard of my *fiancée;* but if she does not give me my freedom — there, I 've said it plainly — this interview will be a nice thing for you and me to carry in our minds, won't it?"

"You will not marry her."

"I most certainly shall."

"You will not, I tell you. That idea of honor ought to be exploded, if it is n't."

"Thank you. I object to being a pioneer in that direction."

"Why, what sort of honor is it," asked Cary, "to stand at the altar and swear before God and man to do a certain set of things which you know thoroughly well you have no intention of doing? What do you think of that, eh?"

"Sophistry," said Van Kirk, starting up from the divan and pacing the floor. "Sophistry. To take either horn of the dilemma would blight my life. I am going to hope for the best from that letter; but" — he turned and held out his hand to his friend, who grasped it heartily — "if I marry her, Cary, I know you. So far as is possible, you will forget all I have said to you."

"If you marry her, I shall say you are a weak man, Van Kirk. That is what it will be, — weak."

Maxwell's eyes looked straight into his friend's. "Yes, I am too weak to endure to have it said that I jilted a woman who had trusted me."

"That is sophistry, if you like," ejaculated the other.

"Sophistry that would lead you, if you were in

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my place, and you know it, Cary. You have not imposed upon me in the least."

"No, no, no!" blustered the other, the more aggressively that he knew he was on uncertain ground. "I 'd let her down easy. Yes, of course I would, and I would fix it so all my world would swear she jilted me, but I would draw the line at marrying her. Yes, sure."

Max laughed. "You 're a trump, old fellow, but you 're perjuring yourself right and left for me. Is n't that rather a mistaken sense of honor, too? Now I have finished for to-day. Tell me about Miss Bruce and show me her picture if you will. I'll say for her that she knows how to choose better than most women."

But Van Kirk was fated not to await his destiny in this friendly circle. The same day, while he and Cary were at dinner in the hotel dining-room, there came a telegram recalling him to New York on a business errand.

He looked around for Miss Bagg and her party, but none of them were in sight. A waiter vouchsafed the information that they had finished dinner, and he believed they were on the piazza; so when Van Kirk rose from the table he went out-of-doors. The rain had ceased, but a dense white mist hung low against the hills.

Going around the corner of the hotel he came face to face with Olive. She had a black lace scarf thrown lightly over her head, and her amber hair touched her forehead in rings from the dampness.

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She certainly started at sight of him, and Max noticed it and mentally remarked its strangeness. He thought of young Spencer and what Miss Bagg had said, and could have believed that the painful sensation the memory aroused was jealousy, only, low as he had fallen in his own estimation, he refused to admit that he who so recently wooed another woman had sunk to such depths as to be jealous of the man whom Olive favored.

She looked at him calmly. "I am letting the wind blow my headache away," she said.

"I hope it may," he returned, falling into step with her. "I came to say good-by again. I am recalled to the city."

"Yes? Too bad they won't permit you to take a little vacation. The thought of New York is not a tempting one just now."

She turned her head and met his gaze with her beautiful, honest eyes, and for the first time Van Kirk wondered if it might be their honesty which had given him a new ideal which Ida was not.

Then Cary's words rushed back to him with alluring and flattering sweetness. He recalled the clinging of Olive's hand when she greeted him suddenly last night. A glowing sensation pervaded him from head to foot. He lived long in that second, but it passed and he struck earth again. How she had laughed at him afterward. It had been as though one looked for warmth and comfort and received an icy bath.

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Nothing could be more serene than her glance now. He dubbed himself maudlin to have for a moment connected Cary's nonsensical theories with her.

"It has been good to see you again, Olive," he said, "although you have n't treated me very well."

"Have n't I, really?" she asked gravely. "Then I ask your pardon."

"I did n't think you would laugh at me, but, on the whole, I am glad you did. If you can laugh at trouble always, I shall be well satisfied."

"An ungracious part," she returned. "I should be sorry to fit it."

"Oh, here you are, Olive," said Mrs. Carlyle's voice, as that lady came suddenly into sight. "I missed you." She gave a quick look from her daughter to Van Kirk.

"I felt as though the air would refresh me," returned the girl, "and it has. Max is saying good-by, mother."

"Off again?" asked Mrs. Carlyle, joining in the promenade, her arm about her daughter's waist. "You make flying visits."

"Much briefer than I like," returned the young man. "A telegram takes me."

"No bad news, I hope."

"No. Uncle Jotham left affairs in very compact and systematic shape. Nevertheless there is occasionally something for me to attend to more complicated than cutting off Miss Bagg's coupons."

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"Have you seen her? She is there in the parlor."

"Then I will go in. Good-by, Cousin Mary." He held out his hand. "When are you coming back? I suppose your latch-string will be out when you do. You may have to send Olive's winter wardrobe up here, Miss Bagg seems so content with the situation."

Mrs. Carlyle smiled gently as she shook hands with him, but she did not give him one of the cordial and hearty responses which he had received from her all his life, and he felt the lack and it depressed him like a bad omen. Cousin Mary had never before failed him.

"I am growing as nervous as an invalid," he thought impatiently. "Good-by, Olive," he said aloud briefly, holding out his hand. "I hope the ache will vanish, and that the sabres will clash merrily over that head to-night."

"Thank you. I hope so, too," she answered brightly. "Good-by. Good luck to the business."

She passed her arm around her mother as they walked on alone, and drew an involuntary long breath.

"Are we glad he has gone?" asked Mrs. Carlyle tentatively. It was the first time she and Olive had been alone since breakfast.

"Yes, very glad," answered Olive bravely; "but you must not believe, mother, that Max has done anything to be blamed for. I am afraid he noticed that you did not ask him to visit you."

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"Is he really entirely innocent, Olive?"

"Entirely." The girl spoke steadily, but colored to the roots of her hair.

"I am glad to hear that. It would be a great pain to be disappointed in Max. I have not known many men of his age who inspired so much respect."

"But — I do not wish to see him — for a while. I hope he will not come back," said the girl slowly.

"I hope not, too, then. Yet hold yourself calm, my child. Anything can be borne, if we have not done wrong."

"But I have done wrong." Olive was breathing quickly. "I have done the very worst thing a girl can do."

Mrs. Carlyle drew her a little more closely to her side. "Forgive yourself, dear. Relax spiritually, and all the resentment and humiliation will fade away. It is like that mist over there. It obscures and overpowers all the substantial and true things behind it now; and yet the sun is shining full and strong, and in the end will disperse it. You know that God's love is the true and everlasting sun. Turn yourself toward it, darling, and you will find things take their true proportions in the light."

"Do you think I need not suffer?" asked the girl, her voice vibrating.

"No. You may have to suffer; and yet there are heights in your being where you may rise

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above that very sorrow. One of the best helps, as we have always learned, is to do the duty that lies next you each minute. That plain doing provides a something into which strength flows. Another help is to take a long view. Go up high in your thought, dear, and take a long view. You did not come into being by accident to stumble along through life and suffer without reason or benefit. You were created by a God who is Love, because He wished to give you eternal life and happiness. Now that you have met a serious sorrow, He knows it, and He will help you bear it and show you at the right time why He permitted it."

"You help me bear it, mother," murmured Olive. "How ungrateful I am to forget for one minute that I have you!"

"It is He that helps you through me, then."

"But I can get hold of you," murmured the girl.

"He knows that and leads you gently, dear. Keep looking up, and keep being grateful, through everything. Remember what I have so often said, that life is a great, mysterious game of Magic Music. You are groping like everybody else, trying to discover what before you came upon the scene was foreseen for you to do. You thought perhaps in the present instance you had found out an important link in the chain of events. Then you became aware with a shock that you were mistaken."

They paused in a corner of the north piazza, and

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Olive took her mother's hand and held it while she looked down at the river.

"If you were mistaken, and what you thought you wanted is not really for you, not a part of what is your own, then you do not really wish for it; for He who plans your destiny knows best, and only seeks to bless you."

The girl looked around and met her mother's eyes, a pathetic longing in her gaze. "I wish I need not want it so," she said almost inaudibly.

Mrs. Carlyle pressed the fresh cheek with her own.

"Hold yourself quiet, dear," she answered, "and listen for the divine music. Your soul will hear it."

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CHAPTER XX.

A NEW ARRIVAL.

MRS. CARLYLE'S last day at the post dawned crystal clear. West Point is like a beauty who rewards appropriate and lovely costuming. Bathed in soft rain and sunshine, clothed in delicately shaded verdure, girded with the myriad jewels of the sparkling river, — on a morning like this she uplifts and refreshes the heart.

"It is altogether too good to leave," observed Miss Bagg, as they came down the steps from the hotel. "I wish you could reconsider, Cousin Mary."

"I have had all that I may this time," returned Mrs. Carlyle, "and it has invigorated me wonderfully. I leave my little girl with you very gratefully."

"I have been afraid the last few days that Olive was growing tired of it," said Lydia. "She has seemed rather quiet, and has n't taken quite the same interest in things."

"No, she is very glad to stay. I gave her her choice. So long as Miss Bertha is with you I knew you did not need her."

"I should be very sorry to have her go."

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"Then we are all satisfied," replied Mrs. Carlyle.

They were on their way to the camp to see guard mounting, and now the girls joined them. The band was pouring forth the patriotic strains of "Hail Columbia" as our party passed beyond the hedge. By the time they had found good places among the visitors' seats, troop-parade was in progress. Lieutenant Cary approached and greeted them.

"Well, the poor plebes are in camp," observed Miss Bagg, looking up at him anxiously; "I hope they 're all right."

"They seem to be alive so far," returned Cary, smiling and leaning one hand on the iron back of the rustic sofa.

"You officers ought to protect them," declared Miss Bagg solemnly.

"We have done what we can. I don't think there will be much hazing this year. C company is pretty safe, at any rate."

"That is your company," returned Lydia, with interest.

The lieutenant nodded. "Hemenway will do as much as I can. He is a very strong man — Hemenway. He won't have any nonsense. He summoned the cadets to his tent the night before the plebes came into camp, and I fancy he read them the Riot Act."

Miss Spencer listened to this with sharpened ears. It flattered her vanity; for might she not believe that her vigorous denunciation of torment-

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ing these strangers had influenced the young captain to an action pretty sure to make him unpopular in the corps?

"I do like Mr. Hemenway," said Lydia heartily. "Now, was n't that nice of him! I have seen enough of that squad drilling on the plain," she continued, shaking her head. "I wish first-class men could attend to that. Those corporals are not *polite*."

Cary smiled at the earnest announcement, made more in sorrow than in anger.

"I don't see why you tactical officers allow such severity," added Miss Bagg reproachfully.

"Oh, for the most part the corporals are doing their best. It does n't do to interfere with them too much. You see, Miss Bagg, it is n't as though none but modest and well-bred young fellows presented themselves at the academy. Young men come to West Point at the age when they are sure they know it all, — many of them quite certain that they have the world by the tail and are going to swing it in any direction they choose. Now, the first thing for them to learn here is that they are at the very beginning of all things; that even a yearling is a creature so infinitely above them that they are not to be mentioned in the same breath with him. When they have assimilated this fact and are adjusted to the situation, they are down on hard-pan and can begin to build up. When they graduate from the academy they are supposed to be fitted to fill any social position as well as that

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required by their profession, and as you have seen some of the recruits we get, you will agree with me in thinking that for making a silk purse out of that material which the Creator did not design for the purpose, West Point has no superior."

Mrs. Carlyle had also been listening to this little harangue. "I think that constitutes the charm of the work here as it appears to a spectator," she said. "One comes to feel that honor, dignity, and a right self-respect are being inculcated day by day into these young men. It seems as though the strict method and order and cultivation of mind and body must lay the foundation for a noble manhood."

"It does. The curriculum is a fine one."

"The picturesque side," continued Mrs. Carlyle, "the strength and beauty displayed in the tactical part, is very interesting. I have been wondering why it is that there is something so inspiring to everybody in the idea of armies; the uniforms, the weapons, the unanimous action. It stirs the blood to see the working even on a small representative scale, and I have discovered an explanation which at least satisfies me."

"What is it?" asked Cary.

Mrs. Carlyle gave him her calm smile. "You will think it very fanciful, perhaps, but I believe it is because the whole matter of arming and preparing for defense corresponds to the great underlying spiritual facts of warfare with and defense against evil."

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"That is an interesting suggestion," returned Cary politely, but he did think the speaker fanciful. Underlying facts were not usually mined for among the visitors at West Point troop-parade.

This ceremony was now finished, and cadets not on duty came hastening to meet the young girls who were scattered in groups under the trees.

Lieutenant Cary excused himself, and went up to the hotel to breakfast. Now and then a plebe in the uniform gray trousers and short shell-jacket crossed the green on some errand, his palms to the front, his thumbs out, and his toes as depressed as his spirits.

It had come around again to be Osborn Hemenway's turn to perform a tour of guard duty. He appeared now in the full dress of officer of the day, and, approaching our party, paused before Miss Spencer and lifted his plumed hat before settling the chin-strap in its place.

The girl looked him over critically. Anything more trim, speckless, and cleanly shining than his uniform and accoutrements could not be found. Then she raised her eyes to his face.

"You don't look pretty in that hat," she said nonchalantly.

The big young man returned her look with his usual steady gaze. He was always unprepared for her random remarks, and knew no more where she would strike next than the mastiff can predict the antics of the toy terrier which gambols about him.

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"I didn't come out here to look pretty," he returned stoically.

Olive felt sorry for him. He was so beautifully spick and span. She thought he deserved some acknowledgment.

"I am glad you are going to be officer of the day," she said, "for it is my mother's last morning, and you are so tall you are more impressive than some of the others when you review the guard. That moment when you uncover your head and the drum-major and all the others pass by to swinging music and salute you is positively thrilling. I never get tired of seeing it."

"Salute us now," ordered Bertha.

Hemenway smiled, and good-naturedly uncovering his head held his plumed hat in his white-gloved right hand over his left shoulder.

After a moment of this respectful attitude he lowered the hat and looked at it.

"That plume," he remarked colloquially, "is the fullest, handsomest one in the corps."

"I'll warrant it is, if you chose it," replied Bertha sweetly.

"I had nothing to do with choosing it," he rejoined quickly, nettled out of his usual self-possession. "They are issued to us."

"There are so many things I wish I understood about your terms for things," said Olive, willing to make a diversion. "Companies and battalions and regiments and all that, and how many of one makes another. You know what I mean."

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Hemenway turned his gray eyes upon the speaker. They were pleasant, well-shaded eyes, and Bertha had confided to Olive in private that she believed he put his lashes up in curl-papers at night.

"How many companies in a regiment?" he began, when Bertha shrugged her shoulders and raised her eyebrows.

"He is such a heavy man," she remarked. "One can get something out of him, if one can wait; but he is so slow."

At this point the adjutant and his shadow, the sergeant-major, came into view, and the retiring officer of the day joined Hemenway, who smiled imperturbably at Olive.

"Save up your questions, Miss Carlyle," he said. "Another time;" then he walked out upon the green and stood a little in advance of his predecessor, for the adjutant's call had sounded, and the new guard had marched on.

Mr. Le Roy, the cadet lieutenant who had made himself such a favorite with Miss Bagg, approached and greeted our party.

"How are the poor plebes getting along?" asked Miss Lydia.

Le Roy smiled and replied, in his quiet fashion:

"Finely, finely, Miss Bagg. We treat them like lords. We have yearlings to fix up their tents for them, and bring them lemonade, and attend to any little wish they may express."

Miss Bagg smiled and shook her head. Bertha fixed him with her reproachful gaze.

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"How about Mr. Kidd?" she asked, her mischievous smile touching the corners of her lips.

The young lieutenant laughed. "Oh, yes," he answered, "the kid that gambols up and down the company street."

"What do you think of that, Miss Bagg?" asked Olive. "One of your plebes happens to be named Kidd, and so he must gambol about on all fours and nibble grass to divert these intellectual young men."

"Now, should n't you think they would have more sense?" demanded Lydia plaintively. "Well, it never happened in C company," she added, with a confident glance at Le Roy, who was Hemenway's lieutenant.

It was a significant fact that while the other three company streets were deserted, not a plebe venturing to emerge from his tent, at the opening of C company street was gathered a little knot of shell-jacketed, sombre gray figures, watching with all their eyes the pretty ceremony of guard mounting.

"I told them they might look on," replied Le Roy carelessly, to Lydia's grateful questioning.

"Now is your time, Mr. Le Roy," declared Olive. "Ask Miss Bagg anything, to the half of her kingdom. It is yours."

"See the poor things," said Bertha. "They are so sober-colored. Does n't it seem as if they had been snubbed and hazed and squad-drilled into perfect grubs? Miss Bagg, why don't you go and

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take a plebe in one hand and a white and gray and crimson and gold cadet officer in the other and say: 'Poor chrysalis, take courage. Behold the butterfly?'"

They all laughed, but Olive touched her mother. "Now is n't this effective?" she asked. "I like this part."

Hemenway, who had been standing erect, with arms folded, now uncovered his head. The loudly playing band and the guard passed before him, every officer saluting.

"You like to see him show his respect for the guard?" said Le Roy to Olive. "Very deceptive sometimes, I assure you. When a man has his partner engaged for a hop and his plans are cut off by unexpectedly having to act officer of the day, he does n't feel a particle of respect for the guard, no matter what he may appear to do."

"He seeks consolation sometimes in ordering the drums to beat five minutes before the real time to close the hop," declared Bertha, with a knowing nod.

Le Roy laughed. "Never, I am sure, Miss Spencer."

"It is a wicked shame, too," added the girl.

She looked after Hemenway as he departed with his companion for their tour around the camp. It was a pity he could not see the expression of her eyes.

The band marched to its place near the visitors' tent, for the morning practice.

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A blonde cadet of very youthful appearance approached and greeted Bertha eagerly.

"Good morning, Mr. Wild," she returned. "You know Miss Carlyle. Have you met Mrs. Carlyle? Let me introduce you to Miss Bagg."

"How do you like West Point, Mr. Wild?" asked Lydia, as the young fellow raised his cap.

"Very much, except for the trouble it is to stay here," was the artless response. Mr. Wild was one of those happy-go-lucky youths who are always on the ragged edge, ready to slip back down the steeps of Parnassus.

"I saw you drilling a squad of plebes the other day," said Miss Spencer severely. "I believe when a private is detailed to assist, you are worse than the officers."

"Why, they want us to jump on them, really," returned the yearling, delighted to have Miss Spencer to himself a moment, whether severe or otherwise. "You 've got to do it, or else the plebes won't pay any attention to you. I remember there was one good-natured corporal over us when I first came here, and whenever he took our squad we laughed in our sleeves and knew we need n't work hard."

"I am afraid you were a very evil-disposed plebe," returned Bertha, shaking her head gravely.

"It is pretty good fun to holler at them at first," pursued Mr. Wild candidly, "but you get awfully tired of it. Why, the next morning after you saw me I was so hoarse I had to swallow a

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whole spoonful of vaseline before I could speak aloud."

"It is n't the way to treat them," remarked Bertha, with an expression which indicated that she knew accurately what the right way would be and the authorities made a mistake not to interview her.

Then she rose with her friends, leaving Mr. Wild, when she parted with him, very undecided in his youthful mind as to her opinion of him. Perhaps it was quite as well that he did not suspect that she might not think about him at all.

The fine morning had proved deceptive. Threatening clouds rose swiftly, and, whether for this or some other reason, a signal from the drums made the announcement that there would be no drill.

A subdued murmur, like the echo of a cheer, arose in camp, and out came a plebe into one of the streets, and went through a triumphant performance of flapping his wings and crowing.

"Well, now, that looks as if he were in good spirits," suggested Mrs. Carlyle, as they walked on.

"My dear Mrs. Carlyle," said Bertha, laughing, "that was a little favor he was doing for a first-class man."

Olive and her mother, when the others had gone into the hotel, walked on to Trophy Point and sat down.

The hillside at their feet was flecked with buttercups, daisies, and red clover. The cloud shadows darkened the bosom of the water. The moun-

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tains, covered with their close, rugged evergreens, were for the moment gigantic banks of moss, velvety in texture and touched with high lights.

"What a blessed thing it is that I can take this with me right into Twenty-fourth Street," said Mrs. Carlyle, after they had sat for some time enjoying in silence. She looked across at Martlaer's Rock, the island in whose heart she had recently enjoyed a day of most gracious and graceful hospitality. She thought of the sweet, old-fashioned garden, the house overreached by the protecting arms of sturdy, far-spreading trees, and the wren's nest in the corner of the piazza, whose busy occupant, flitting in and out, "sang as though she came into a fortune every five minutes."

"I shall not like to think of you to-morrow in the midst of drudgery," said Olive.

"And you need not, for I shall not be there. My mind is full of memories which will enchant my surroundings for a long time to come, and I shall be speeding up here in spirit every hour."

"Dear little mother."

"I am so glad you decided to remain, Olive. This is a good place for you for a while longer," added Mrs. Carlyle. "You are behaving well, dear. I congratulate you and I thank you."

The girl smiled down at the river, where a steamer was slowly drawing a little village of barges after it.

But that afternoon, after her mother had gone, Bertha found her in her room, crying.

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"Why you dear girl," said Miss Spencer, putting her arms gently around her. "How hard-hearted you make me feel. Just think how long it is since I have seen *my* mother."

Olive yielded to her friend's embrace, but her quiet sobbing continued.

"Of course I have thought every day might be the last," continued Bertha, "but now my aunt has passed through her ordeal so successfully, and mamma writes such happy, hopeful letters, I never thought of crying for her, but I shall now if you don't stop."

"Let me — cry," said Olive, who had really behaved so very well that, now her mother was not by to suffer for her, she needed this indulgence.

Her dead hope had received decent burial, and, though she meant never to visit its grave, sometimes her unruly thoughts brought her unexpectedly upon it, often at a time when it would be the extreme of bad form to omit a smile and a jest.

So now she mourned secretly in Bertha's arms, and relieved her swelling heart, while Miss Spencer wondered a little, but patted her shoulder soothingly and passed away the time in admiring her friend's hair.

"You have been very good to me," said Olive at last, sitting up. "You won't tell Miss Bagg."

"No, indeed. There is nothing like a good cry once in a while," returned Miss Spencer, going to the glass and beginning to make her toilet. "Do you see it is clearing off? There will be parade."

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"Do help me get out of going to parade to-day!" begged Olive. "You see how my eyes look."

"Nothing easier. Oversleep," suggested Bertha sententiously.

"Well, I will lie down and try. Cousin Lydia will think I am crazy."

"Oh, no. She is at Mrs. Mackenzie's this afternoon and will stay late, no doubt. I'll fix it. Don't worry."

So it was that when Bertha tripped over to camp alone in her most fetching gown, Miss Bagg met her anxiously.

"I have to report a 'cold absence' for Miss Carlyle," she declared lightly.

"Why, what's the matter? I had better go up and see her."

"No, indeed, she would n't like it at all. She is lying down, and she has Howells's last and does n't want to be disturbed. She said she would trust Ralph to go through it all right once without her."

Miss Bagg was easily persuaded not to forego the spectacle, and as Bertha was led away by the pretty daughter of the commandant to join a bevy of girls, Lydia took her customary seat. It was shared this afternoon with a rather portly, richly dressed lady whom she had not seen before.

The latter, who had observed by unmistakable signs that Miss Bagg was not a stranger, cast several tentative glances toward her. Lydia occa-

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sionally caught her eye, and after the ceremonies were well begun the stranger addressed her: —

"Excuse me, but can you tell me the name of the adjutant?"

"Certainly. His name is Spencer."

"Thank you. I think one is always interested in the adjutant, and this one is unusually graceful and fine-looking. My son graduated from the academy."

"Indeed?" Miss Bagg was alive with interest at once. "Was he adjutant?"

"No, he was a captain."

"I think you are to be congratulated. This training makes such men of them."

The stranger gave a little gracious bow, and decided that Miss Bagg was a most agreeable person.

"I expected to find my son here," continued the lady, "and am much disappointed."

"Ah, that is too bad," returned Lydia politely. "You must have many associations with this place."

"Yes. Not of the pleasantest sort. Very few mothers of cadets can have. One does n't find it easy to relinquish all claim to one's own flesh and blood."

Parade over, the two sauntered up to the hotel together, talking quite like old friends of the subject which they had in common.

Olive happened to come to the door as they approached, and seeing them, shrank back and lost a little of her color.

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In a moment she recovered herself and came forward.

"You surprised me very much, Cousin Elinor," she said. "When did you come?"

Miss Bagg looked on in surprise as they kissed one another.

"Why, Olive, you know I was sure of finding Max here. They told me at the office that he was away and his mail was to be sent here; so I came right up, for I was in great haste to see him. I did n't know whether you were still here or not, and I was feeling quite friendless over there at parade, seeing no one I knew, when I met this lady. Perhaps you are acquainted."

To her surprise Olive slipped her hand through the little woman's arm.

"That is quite a joke. Cousin Lydia, what a faculty you have for meeting connections of your own family by chance. This is Maxwell's mother, Mrs. Van Kirk. Let me formally introduce Miss Bagg."

Mrs. Van Kirk stared. There could be no doubt about it, — she stared. All her preconceived plans were shattered. She had accepted from and shown this person a graciousness which could not be retracted.

She tried desperately to get her bearings, and wondered vaguely if frigidity were possible. Miss Bagg's manner had been winning, she was extremely well-dressed, and she possessed a great deal of money, — three factors of importance in

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deciding Mrs. Van Kirk's opinion of any one. Moreover, Lydia was looking at her with real and cordial interest.

"I am so glad to know you at last," she said. "I am very much attached to your son."

It so happened that Mrs. Van Kirk's inimical feelings were all just now roused against another person, and this being the case Miss Bagg's pleasant sincerity won the day.

"We ought to be friends," she answered, holding out her hand. Lydia returned its pressure heartily, and after a few more civil words left the two friends together and went into the house.

"I have come up here outraged," said Mrs. Van Kirk then, turning back to Olive. "Ida Fuller is engaged to Max. What do you think of that, Olive Carlyle?"

The poor child's heart seemed to leap to her very throat, and a sharp pain leaped with it. Had the hope been buried alive? Pitiful thought. Now at any rate it was dead — dead!

She carried herself wonderfully well, however.

"I thought you were very fond of her," she replied.

"I was; but I am thoroughly angry with her now. We parted in anger; she was as insolent and arrogant as ever. My poor boy, how mistaken he is!"

Mrs. Van Kirk lifted her rose-scented handkerchief to her eyes.

"Don't excite yourself, Cousin Elinor," said Olive. "It will all come out right."

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"Max is so deceived in her," continued the mother. "I object to the match on the score of their relationship, but I object still more on the score of her worldliness and triviality. I abhor worldliness. How handsome you are growing Olive!" The addition was made in the same tone of injury which had led up to it, and brought a slight smile to the girl's lips.

"You see," continued Mrs. Van Kirk, "I have had everything to bear. We met a millionaire at St. Augustine, a great porpoise of a creature with scarcely a spear of hair, — unbearable. Ida made a perfect fool of that man; he was simply silly about her. I argued with her, but she always laughed me off. He was coarse, he was dull, but she seemed to enjoy leading him on. The infatuated creature actually followed us to Old Point Comfort, where we have been the last two weeks, and Ida welcomed him sweetly. Well, just as I had resigned myself to the inevitable, did n't that girl calmly come in one day and tell me she was engaged to Max!"

The speaker looked at Olive, who shook her head in silence.

"I won't bear it. I won't have it. I 'll tell Max all about that poor, swindled oil man. Yes, he was an oil man of some kind, and he looked it. I 'll expose Ida. She has not been respectful to me, nor dutiful in any way. If it comes to a fight between us for my boy, we shall see who will win."

"She will win," said Olive briefly.

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"Why do you say that?"

"I thought long ago that he loved her. He will believe in her. You might as well resign yourself, Cousin Elinor."

"How can you talk so cold-bloodedly? But it is easy enough when one is a dispassionate spectator. I should think though, Olive," — reproachfully, — "you would have enough interest in Max to enter into my feelings."

"You know I am worse than helpless, Cousin Elinor."

"Well, I do not admit defeat before the battle. Let us go in to supper now. How you have blossomed out this year, Olive!"

"Nothing but fine feathers," returned the girl. "Cousin Lydia has decked me."

"Your gown is in perfect taste," murmured the other with melancholy satisfaction. "Come, let us go in."

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CHAPTER XXI.

OLD GUARD PRIVILEGES.

THE next morning that most familiar West Point trio, a girl, a cadet, and a parasol, might have been seen on the shaded road which leads up to Fort Putnam.

Old guard privileges, as they are called, constitute the sugar which sweetens the pill of guard duty, and Mr. Hemenway, after the vigils of the night, was now taking his recompense.

Miss Spencer was his companion on the winding walk.

"I wish these rocks and trees could speak," she observed, "and tell us of some of the things and people they have seen."

"I am mighty glad they can't," responded Hemenway promptly. "I have been longing to get somewhere where I could n't hear anybody speak but you for a while. It would be a nice state of things if the trees and rocks should commence."

Bertha looked at him. "My young Christian friend, are n't you interested in history?"

"Not a little bit."

"Think how your forefathers went and came by this very road."

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"That's all right," returned Hemenway, equably. "They had their innings; now I have mine."

"Think of their anxieties, their hopes and fears!"

"I have plenty of my own, thank you. I am hoping you will be good to me all this morning and fearing you won't."

He looked down at his companion with a half smile. She shook her head. "What a hopelessly unimaginative man you are!" she said.

"You were never so mistaken in your life. I can imagine all sorts of pleasant things," he replied, looking at the hint of a blue vein in her temple and the blackness of her cloudy hair.

Bertha laughed. "It would be amusing to hear what sort of things you would imagine, I am sure."

"Well, I can imagine that you might take my arm now, going up this steep place. That would be pleasant — to me."

"What a flight of fancy!" — with light scorn. "I will when I am forty."

"If I were sure you would when you were forty," replied the other quickly, "I'd let you off now."

"What do you suppose I heard about the plebes last night?" asked Bertha with sudden and reproachful irrelevancy.

"I don't know and I care less," replied Hemenway, who was thoroughly weary of this harassing subject.

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His companion raised her dark eyebrows.

"Would it be too much to ask you to hold that parasol so the sun would not come directly in my eyes?" she asked deliberately and sweetly.

"Oh, excuse me." Hemenway tilted the parasol with a jerk.

"Thank you," returned Bertha. They had been but a brief moment in the sunshine, but she had known how to make hay the while. Her escort felt convicted of both brusqueness and carelessness.

"Such strange thoughts suggest themselves to me here," she observed after a moment of silence. "Why should not the ghosts of Kosciusko, Arnold, André, and all the rest haunt these quiet dells?"

Mr. Hemenway drew a long breath. "Say, if you want to talk about the plebes, do. They 're at least modern," he ejaculated. "Let us have them and get done with them."

"I am afraid you did n't sleep enough last night," suggested Bertha. "I pity the sentries, if this was your midnight mood."

"Is there any way of pleasing you?" asked her companion plaintively.

"I am the most easily pleased person in the world," returned Miss Spencer calmly. "I simply don't like to hear that when it rains and time hangs heavy on the cadets' hands in camp, they give the order 'Turn out the menagerie,' and all the plebes who happen to have names to fit the parts are obliged to go out in the street in the

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rain and make the noises and give the action of the animals they represent."

The young captain forgot himself so far as to laugh; but, seeing the awful severity in Miss Spencer's face, sobered at once.

"I should like to know who in thunder tells you all these things," he said with exasperation. "Some fool of a yearling, I suppose. What do you expect me to do about it?"

"Prevent it."

"Nonsense. You ought to know I can't. As it is, I have half the corps down on me. You always talk as though I were the only officer in the whole institution."

"So you are, to me," said the girl, with an upward glance which utterly demolished her companion's wrath. His face flushed and he gazed at her, dumb.

"And if the rest only knew what a bear you are they would add you to the menagerie," she continued, smiling. "The next time I take a walk with an officer of the day on old guard privileges you will know it. Don't you wish you could whip out your list and write down: Spencer, B. Insolence to superior officer on the road to Fort Putnam?"

"If I did that every time you deserved it," returned Hemenway, reluctantly smiling, "you would be 'found on demerit' before camp breaks. Look here, Miss Baby, for an O. D. on O. G. P. I think I'm having a pretty hard time. I've strained a

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point for those — Dutch hotel plebes, and you know why. For heaven's sake don't let them spoil any more of the half hours I get alone with you. Is n't there any other downtrodden biped on the post we can take for a change? How about the orderlies? Do you think they receive sufficient consideration?"

"I saw one nearly run over by the color-bearer at cavalry drill day before yesterday," remarked Miss Spencer. "My heart stopped beating."

"Let them keep out of the way, then."

"Precisely. You looked about as moved as that. I think you all turn savage when you are mounted." Miss Spencer burst into an infectious laugh. "The other morning Miss Bagg and I came out of the library, and as we touched the cavalry plain we noticed the horses coming, but we thought of course the riders would look out for us. Not a bit of it. We seemed to be invisible. Those monsters were nearly upon us, and I tell you we dropped our dignity and picked up our little skirts and skedaddled. No other word would describe it. We did n't run; we just skedaddled. Truly, I think you were lovely about the plebes," she added, suddenly dropping her voice. "I heard about it."

Hemenway brightened visibly. "Then if I promise to induce the tac to stop the drill and clear the plain when an orderly wants to cross, and always salute a plebe when I meet him, may we leave the subject and talk about the weather?"

"About the view!" cried Bertha, for they had now emerged at the fort. "Why, you can see the

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whole of Picturesque America," she added delightedly.

"It is a first-rate day for it," returned Hemenway. "That is the line of the Catskills yonder."

Bertha gazed in silence. The river wound among the Highlands for miles in both directions. The buildings of the post lay far below, and occasionally a toy horse and wagon crossed between the plains.

"Now you see the way the barracks appear to the angels," remarked Hemenway, looking down at the hollow square.

"It ought to make angels of you all to live in such a beautiful place," replied his companion.

"See these dungeons," said Hemenway, turning and leading her to the series of deep vaults in the side of the mountain.

"Are they? Do you suppose they were?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Either that or shelter for troops."

"Oh, they 're so dark and deep. I don't believe they were quarters. I would ever so much rather think they were dungeons."

The cadet raised his eyebrows. It was slightly contradictory that this idea contained a relish for the young woman whose heart was wrung by the fact that a homesick plebe should be forced to spell his name backward with a punctilious "Sir" after each letter, but he wisely refrained from trying to understand it. He had learned that the intricacies of the feminine mind lay as far above the

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complications of higher mathematics as Fort Putnam above the barracks.

"All right," he returned. "I did n't know as I had better admit the dungeon theory, for fear you would demand that I should produce all the redcoat prisoners and make it up to them somehow."

Bertha looked at him, her thoughtful gaze seeming to see beyond him. "Think of being locked in one of those — alone at night — away up here!" she said fearfully.

Hemenway watched her, slightly smiling. "I am thinking," he said.

After a moment's silence her gaze suddenly withdrew and met his. She made a little movement toward him. "Oh, I would so much rather be here in the bright sunshine and safe with you!" she exclaimed.

Instantly the pretty parasol was on the ground, and Hemenway had both her hands in his.

"My parasol! My parasol!" she cried, starting back, blushing furiously and half-laughing, for the beribboned thing was careering gayly over the wind-swept height.

It is to be feared that the particulars regarding the locality of the hotel in Holland were explicitly stated by Mr. Hemenway as he "double-timed" after the sunshade. It was as saucy and gay in appearance as its mistress, and, he believed, shared her characteristics. Any other girl's parasol would have lain where it fell and allowed him to improve his one golden opportunity. He anathematized

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the total depravity of inanimate objects in general and this one in particular, as the silken thing, after it had done all the mischief necessary, stopped whirling far short of the crumbling parapet and lay there, flying its ribbons like little flags of triumph.

Bertha laughed, looking mischievous and rosy as he returned, and there was no recalling that moment in which of her own accord she had drawn close to him.

"*I* may be safe with you, but my belongings are n't," she laughed. "I can hold that, if it is too much for you. Why, you have n't an idea how savage you look. Out with that list again and put down something about Spencer B.'s insubordinate parasol! What do I hear?" she asked suddenly, "that queer, deep noise?"

"Frogs," replied the cadet captain, who was in a mood for sententious speech.

"Frogs? A likely story. I suppose you have marshes in such a perfect state of discipline here that they come up on the mountain tops."

"There is an old well over there belonging to the fort. The frogs monopolize it now."

"How interesting! What tremendous voices! Let us go quietly and see if we can't see them. Now, don't you make the least noise."

So Hemenway was obliged to steal along with the quiet of a scout, beside his companion, as though his life depended on seeing the green-coated vocalists who were chorusing before high heaven.

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Perched on rocks, about a deep, quiet pool, were frogs of great size and lung-power. As Bertha and her escort approached, the cadet stepped on a dry twig. At the crackling sound she put out her hand involuntarily. Promptly he grasped it, at the same time tightening his hold on the parasol. It should not foil him again. The girl's cheeks reddened. She tried to withdraw her imprisoned hand, but in vain. She gave her companion a magnificent frown, which said plainer than words: "Unhand me, villain." It had not the slightest effect.

After a "ker-chug, ker-chug" of the most ponderous basso-profundo, one after another of the performers dove into the water with a resounding splash. Bertha devoted her eager attention to the pool. One huge frog still sat on a rock, swelling his throat and uttering his croak with the most absurd seriousness. Hemenway took advantage of her preoccupation to turn her hand and without relinquishing it to draw it within his arm. So they stood beneath the parasol, facing the intrepid frog, which, as though claiming his prior right to the place, continued to swell and to bellow until he suggested Æsop's hero.

Miss Spencer's face indicated that she was unaware of leaning on her companion's arm. She finally burst into an irrepressible laugh.

"Oh, you absurd thing!" she cried apostrophizing the frog, "I do believe you think you 're singing. You are like the countryman who wanted to

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play Hamlet, — 'you have the feelin's, but you have n't the figger.'"

The vocalist had not remained to receive this insult. At the peal of laughter he gave one glare from his bright eyes, and with a "chug" and a splash was gone, while the ripples widened to the water's edge.

"Did you ever see such a big thing?" asked Bertha, looking up. "Now, perhaps frogs ought not to live in marshes after all," she added, seriously.

"Perhaps not," returned Hemenway, with docility, looking down from under his heavy lashes into her upturned eyes, whose stars had seldom shone so near him.

"You know how it is about pigs," she pursued.

"Yes, indeed," he murmured, wishing the hand he was clasping was not gloved.

"Well, what is it, if you know?" she asked.

"I — a — well — I — you tell me."

"I suspected you did n't know a thing about it. Why, they say that pigs — is n't it queer that you don't care anything for history, and yet are so interested in natural history?" She dropped her head back and looked at him innocently.

"I shall kiss her if she does that again," thought Hemenway. "I can't help it."

"I was always that way, from a child," he returned aloud, "and if there is one thing I always did dote on, it is pigs."

"Why, they say they flourish so much better if

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they have a clean home and clean food, you know," said Miss Spencer. "Now, perhaps frogs ought to live on mountain-tops instead of in bogs. Just see how they grow — and — and — croak. Now, that is all, Mr. Hemenway," she added, biting her lip, her cheeks burning. "The class in natural history is dismissed."

She tried firmly to draw her hand away, but he held it.

"I shall tell the commandant that you must n't act O. D. any more. The loss of sleep affects your brain."

"You gave it to me, Bertha," he said hurriedly, as pale as she was flushed. "Don't take it back. Let me keep it forever. You know I love you."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, the words coming thickly through her quickened breathing.

He released her, and she stood away, her eyes downcast, so utterly changed from the saucy, nonchalant girl who had amused herself with him for years, that he felt a pang of remorse. She looked so small and sweet and precious to him.

"Do forgive me," he begged. "I feel as though I had taken an unfair advantage of you to bring you up here away from everybody and tell you this." He came close to her as he spoke contritely. "Do forgive me."

"You — you could n't very well have said it before everybody," she answered slowly.

"That is it," he exclaimed fervently. "Of course I could n't. You always were the most

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sensible, reasonable girl in the world. Let us sit down over here."

They moved to a high knoll covered all about and far down the steep with thousands of golden-hearted daisies, and seated themselves on the side most guarded from the strong, sweet wind.

Hemenway shielded her with the parasol and looked at her anxiously. Her white silk blouse was fastened with pins whose heads were little turquoise-bodied, diamond-winged flies. Hemenway always afterward connected his anxiety with those tiny jewels, and never saw them without recalling it. He did not know what her look meant. She gazed off at the fair picture in silence.

"You have n't said whether you forgive me," he reminded her presently.

She gave the slightest smile. "Let me see." She broke a daisy.

"What are you going to do with that?"

Bertha looked straight into his anxious eyes. "Why, don't you know 'He loves me, he loves me not'?" she inquired softly.

"No, I only know he loves you."

"Oh, the daisy knows best — always."

"I know better than any daisy on the fort, Bertha. Say, do you mind if I call you Bertha?"

"Two things to find out from the daisies," she returned. "Let us see first if you may call me Bertha." She pulled off the petals one by one, — "May, may not, may," she finished, and gave him another little smile.

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"And I know you forgive me without tearing another flower to pieces," he said, for her eyes were soft and dreamy, and the little stars were quenched.

"It all depends on how you behave hereafter," she answered.

He could not understand her, and after giving her one more troubled look he too gazed off at the landscape, and tried to console himself with the fact that a fold of her dress lay upon his hand. He had never supposed she did care for him, and he had not intended to tell his love to-day.

He believed now that she felt very kindly toward him as her brother's classmate and intimate friend, and because he loved in vain. He supposed the latter fact always appealed to women. He had never seen her in such a soft mood as the present, but she had gently given him to understand that he must speak no further, and he was not in danger of doing so, for he was the sort of man whose unworthiness in his own eyes is magnified by a woman's rejection of him.

"Is n't this heavenly?" she said at last.

"It might be," he answered.

"Oh;" she shrugged her shoulders and turned her head away, smiling across at the other mountains as though to call upon them to witness that similar stupidity had never existed on earth. She slowly drew her gloves off, and reaching out one white hand broke another daisy.

"Are you as much interested in botany as

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you are in natural history?" she inquired, demurely.

"If I held your hand while you told me about it I dare say I should be."

"You may."

"What did you say?" ejaculated Hemenway, sitting up.

"I said you might."

He looked at her hand. It had a small moonstone ring on its third finger, and looked as inoffensive as a little hand may. Bertha gave him a side glance, and bit the daisy stem in order not to smile.

"Well, why don't you?" she said indistinctly.

Hemenway reached out his hand slowly and took hers. Its touch made the view heavenly in an instant. "Bertha," he said, and his big voice trembled. "I want to kiss your hand — once."

Her eyes filled with quick tears. "Well, what a goose you are to tell me so!"

Her companion looked at her, supremely bewildered. What were section-room problems to this?

His strong grasp tightened on the little hand.

"You don't know what it is to me," he said, and he was pale, "or you would not make so light of it."

"I am not making light of it. There are — some things — a man — should n't ask for." Here the little catches in her breath became sobs, and Miss Spencer buried her face in her handkerchief.

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"What have I done!" exclaimed her distracted companion, uncertain whether to jump into the frog-pond or to throw himself over the parapet; restrained from either move only by the fact that to accomplish it he would have to drop the hand which was fluttering in his. "I have been an awful brute somehow, but indeed I don't know how," he continued miserably. "Miss Baby! Dear, darling Bertha, do tell me what I ought not to have asked for!"

"To kiss — my hand," came from the depths of the handkerchief. "I always said you were such a heav — heav — heavy man."

Hemenway's head swam. He felt that he was an idiot and had always been one, but it certainly was n't his fault; he must have been born so; and he was able to gather just enough sense together to kiss fervently the hand that he held.

Miss Spencer was nervous and overcome, but she had no intention of crying to an unbecoming extent, so when her palm was rosier than ever from Hemenway's kisses, she dried her eyes and averted her head again.

"Bertha," he said, drawing so near that a bell-button grazed her shoulder, "I know I 'm a heavy fellow; slow, stupid; but I don't understand, dear. What else is it a man should n't ask for? Would you rather I asked a daisy than you if you love me?"

The girl's face turned slowly back to him. "I know better than any daisy on the fort," she an-

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swered, looking down with the little smile he had always found bewitching.

"Then, for heaven's sake" — he began beseechingly.

She lifted her lids. "How could I love such a slow — slow" — It was the last roll of the hapless mouse under the soft, malicious paw, for suddenly the face so near him came nearer. She yielded to him irresistibly. Hemenway caught her in his arms and —

Well, it was a blessed dispensation that for the next hour no other beauty-lover sought the heights of Fort Putnam. The daisies nodded and waved in snowy billows, while the wind that swept them paused and murmured in the trees; but there was no room there for another human soul, for Olympus had a rival now in Mount Independence, and not all the entertainments of the gods could have vied in Hemenway's eyes with his "old guard privileges."

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CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. FULLER'S ACCUSATION.

Miss Bagg happened to be returning from a walk with one of her new friends, when Mr. Hemenway and Miss Spencer slowly approached the hotel.

Mrs. Mackenzie, her companion, smiled and said, nodding in the direction of the pair: "That seems to be a desperate flirtation, but perhaps it is one of the serious affairs. Miss Spencer is a very fascinating girl."

These remarks aroused Lydia's fears. After she had parted from her friend she lingered on the piazza and cast anxious glances down toward the hedge, where Bertha's parasol ribbons were fluttering, not with their late defiant expression, but in subdued little ripples, as though they had been affected by the version of "The Taming of the Shrew" enacted lately on the heights.

She was not reassured by the length of time the cadet captain held Miss Spencer's hand at parting, nor afterwards by the expression of the girl's face when she finally approached and ran up the steps.

"I thought you were never coming," said Miss Bagg, her anxiety making her voice a little sharp.

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"What could you have to say to each other so long?"

"Entirely unfit for repetition," replied Bertha.

"It must be repeated," exclaimed Miss Bagg.

There was no one on the heated piazza but themselves, and Miss Spencer completed Lydia's demoralization by putting her arms around her chaperon's neck and kissing her gently.

Bertha was not of the caressing sort. Miss Bagg pushed her off and gazed into her radiant face with frightened eyes. "Oh you thoughtless wicked girl what have you done!" she ejaculated, without punctuation. "I feel something in the air."

"I should think you would," returned Bertha, "for the air is full of it. Are n't you going to congratulate me?"

"No, indeed. Not for a minute," cried poor Lydia. The battalion as a whole was utterly admirable, composed of a lot of heroes in the abstract, but to have one individual appear in the light of a lover, and that with one of the precious girls intrusted to her care, was wholly a different matter.

"What do you know about him?" she went on excitedly. "What was he before he passed under the hands of the cadet barber and tailor? You know there is nothing in the world so deceptive as a cadet in his fourth year. They 're such gentlemen then, no matter how they commenced. You can't guess where they came from. Have you any idea who he belongs to?"

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"A very distinct idea. He belongs to me," answered the girl.

"Oh, what will your mother say to me? I have been so remiss. I ought to have had my eyes open. I ought to have been studying character instead of chevrons, human nature instead of tactics," mourned poor Lydia, waxing eloquent as the enormity of her offense grew upon her.

Even Bertha's love for teasing could endure no more. "No one will blame you, Miss Bagg," she said with extraordinary gentleness. "You could n't possibly have helped it. It was one of the things to be."

"I could have left the place weeks ago."

"And made me wretched," declared the girl.

"No matter about that."

"How hard-hearted you are," said Bertha, smiling, "and we all thought you were such a friend to the cadets. Now I can set your fears at rest, for Mr. Hemenway is an especial favorite with my mother, and we know all about his family."

Here Miss Bagg gave the speaker a vigorous shake.

"You naughty girl, why did n't you tell me that in the first place?" she exclaimed nervously.

"I should like to know what chance you gave me," laughed Bertha.

"There, now, I 'll kiss you," said Lydia; and she did, after which she inspected the girl's bright eyes. "So you are going to marry a second lieutenant and starve, are you? Well, so would I in

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your place, — but don't you tell Olive that. My! How I am going to watch Olive!"

"Are you, indeed?" inquired that young lady, suddenly coming in sight. "Then you will see me at the dinner-table shortly. Are n't you coming in?"

"I guess you won't care much for dinner when you know what has happened," remarked Miss Bagg.

"What has?" asked Miss Carlyle curiously, gazing at Bertha, who certainly looked a little odd.

"This girl is engaged to that splendid Hemenway — and I want you to understand, Olive, that I am very, very displeased," added Lydia hastily; but the cautious addition was lost, for Olive and Bertha were in each other's arms and looking into one another's tear-wet eyes.

"Are you going to be good to him?" was Olive's not unnatural first question.

"I don't know. I am almost afraid to change my tactics," replied Bertha, "they have worked so well."

"You 'll have to. Everything will be changed now."

"Since when have you become so wise?" asked Miss Spencer. "But I 'm not afraid," she added, "I 'm only — happy."

"Hush, hush!" exclaimed Miss Bagg, as the girls kissed each other for the second time. "I can't have Olive listening to any such thing. Olive Carlyle, attend to me. I forbid your going to walk with Mr. Spencer — anywhere — for the

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rest of our stay; that is, unless your mother will come up again. Do you hear?"

Miss Carlyle colored a little because Mr. Spencer's sister was looking at her, but she smiled as she replied: —

"Mr. Spencer is the safest person in the world for you to let me go about with. He can never fall in love seriously until he leaves the academy. He has n't time. I never saw anybody drawn in so many different directions, and he shows positive genius in his manner of distributing himself in a way to keep the social peace."

"Let him keep on distributing, then," said Miss Bagg shortly. "I would n't have him dangling after a girl under my care for any consideration. The woman does n't live who could say 'No' to him."

Bertha laughed. "Miss Bagg is true to her colors. By the way, speaking of colors, did you ever realize what a regular Solomon of wisdom the Judge is, Olive? It occurred to me yesterday how remarkably foresighted that wonderful bird was when he chose his plumage. Now he escapes having to be painted over, you see, for he already wears the most irreproachable gray and white, with a red sash, and has little bell-buttons for eyes. Oh, trust the Judge!"

"What an absurd girl you are," exclaimed Lydia, and, with one of her laughing companions on each side of her, she permitted herself to be led into the house.

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"We 'll see him carrying arms, yet, Olive," pursued Bertha. "Shall you say 'Kerry — h'mp,' Miss Bagg?" she added, mimicking the cramped pronunciation usually affected by the officer-in-charge at parade.

It happened that Hemenway went to the adjutant's tent several times before he found his friend, but at last they met.

"Hello!" was Spencer's greeting. "Where were you this morning?"

"Fort Put."

"With whom?"

"Your sister."

The adjutant shrugged his shoulders. "Well, are you all there?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, Babe 's a bit rough on you. Every man to his taste, but it strikes me I would spoon somebody a little more — well, reciprocal."

The cadet captain's impassive face broke into a smile.

"You stick to things you know something about, Ralph."

"Well, I rather thought spooning" —

"But you never spooned your sister."

"Yes, I have, once in a while. Nice little girl, Babe, when her quills are n't up."

"She *is* a nice little girl," answered Hemenway slowly and emphatically.

"Well, it is nothing but the contrariness of human nature that makes you think so, old fellow,"

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said his friend. "Seriously, Hemenway, you 're a trump, and I hate to see you skipping everybody else for Babe and following her up in that persistent, steady way of yours."

The other showed his white teeth again. "She says I am such a heavy man," he remarked reminiscently.

"That is the point, you see," returned Spencer, gesturing with earnestness. "She can't appreciate you, and she never will. You 're not her style."

"Oh, do you think so?"

"Yes, that is it," said Spencer again, trying to make his statement as little trying as possible. "Now, take Miss Carlyle; she is one of the lofty, serious natures that might. But Babe isn't serious; nobody can make her serious. I would neglect her a little if I were you."

"Would you?" Hemenway laughed aloud; then he held out his hand, and his happy eyes met his friend's. "Can't you see that I 've made a max, old fellow? Shake."

"Wha-wha-what?" gasped Spencer, clasping the proffered hand.

"Yes, I can't allow you to run down that young lady any longer. She belongs to me."

"Well — I — will — be — hung!" asseverated the adjutant, with a muscular hand-shake at each pause.

"Then if it is n't my duty to run her down, as I thought it was," he added, when he had recovered his breath, "I don't mind telling you the truth,

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and that is that Babe is an immense girl, — simply immense. This last performance of hers settles it. I have felt like ducking her in the river a dozen times since she came, but I 'll forgive her now. The tables are turned. You tyrannize awhile now, Hemenway; it will do her good."

"I am going to try to deserve her, Spencer," said the other earnestly. "I am half afraid still that it is a dream."

"Well, I 'm happy," declared the adjutant, with one final shake of his friend's hand.

"You don't know the first syllable of the word yet," answered the other in such a heartfelt tone that Spencer looked at him curiously.

"That 's right," he said at last; "I like to see a man go the whole figure. You are in luck and so is Babe; I 'll tell her so when I see her."

And he did.

All this time Mrs. Van Kirk was watching every boat and train, expecting the arrival of her son and nursing her wrath against his fiancée. With each succeeding hour the "oil man" grew more gross in appearance and uncouth of manner, and Ida's treatment of her aunt more inexcusable, in the tale she meant to tell Max.

Meanwhile Max had returned to New York from a little unexpected trip he had been obliged to make, and before starting for West Point he concluded to drop in at the house in Twenty-fourth Street to see if there were any message he might take to Olive.

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It was a very warm day. When he ran up the steps he found the house-door open. He was about to ring when a voice, clear, low-pitched, familiar, struck upon his ear and caused his hand to drop as though it had been paralyzed. It was Mrs. Fuller's distinct enunciation which arrested him.

The parlor door was ajar.

"But I must see Olive," he heard her say.

He pulled open the screen door and walked into the house and into the parlor. Ida and Mrs. Carlyle were standing confronting one another, and Mrs. Fuller's face showed repressed excitement.

Upon Van Kirk's entrance a light of anger and suspicion flashed in her eyes.

He murmured some greeting and offered his cousin his hand. She seemed not to see it.

"You will be as disappointed as I am," she said slowly, smiling. "Olive is not here."

"How do you do, Max?" Mrs. Carlyle's cheeks had a little color, but her voice sounded calm. "Ida has just arrived. She expected to find Olive" —

"And so did Max, no doubt," interrupted the young widow, her glowing eyes regarding the newcomer. "Mr. Van Kirk is not usually so devoted to New York in July."

The speaker's nostrils dilated with growing feeling, though she still smiled.

"Your manner could be improved upon, Ida," remarked Max dryly. "Really you are stagey, you know. If you have any message for Olive

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I can take it to her. I expect to see her to-night."

"And you dare to tell me this," exclaimed Mrs. Fuller, fury breaking through her trained composure. Her companions stared at her in amazement.

"Are you out of your mind, Ida?" said Van Kirk.

"No. In it, as you will see," she answered threateningly. "In the winter you asked me to marry you."

She paused and the man bowed his head slightly, regarding her, the droop at the corners of his eyes giving their coldness a haughty emphasis.

"A short time ago you wrote me a letter in which you offered me my freedom. Do you think I did not see through that?"

He made no reply, nor altered his position.

"What had you been doing meanwhile? Who had been your companions? Your letters never mentioned any social life beyond that which you enjoyed in this house. Then you all left town together for West Point. There is always a woman at the bottom of such an affair as this. What woman could have affected you but Olive Carlyle? She has done it. She is in love with you, and she has stolen you from me. She is a thief. I will" —

"Ida Fuller!" Max took a step forward and grasped her wrist as he uttered the exclamation, and a vein stood out in his forehead.

"Yes," she said, with a taunting smile, looking

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up at him undauntedly. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I can't do anything," he answered, low and fiercely, throwing her hand from him, "except remind you that you are degrading yourself. Miss Carlyle is not in this house, thank heaven, and now come away with me."

"Ida!" Mrs. Carlyle was pale and more shaken than she had been for many years; but her voice was no higher-pitched nor more hurried than usual. "It is a sin you commit in accusing a young girl so coarsely of such a thing to her mother and the man you meant to marry."

"Deny it if you can!" Mrs. Fuller, beside herself with jealous wrath, her eyes flashing and her lips twitching, gestured commandingly.

"Do you think I will defend my daughter to you?" Mrs. Carlyle's quiet voice was thrilling. "No. I am now going to leave the house, and I shall not come back until you are through here. I think you will suffer some time in recalling this interview. When that day comes I hope this great insult may serve a use in softening your heart."

Mrs. Carlyle walked from the room, not looking even at Max, who, still unconsciously frowning, stood, unable to utter a word to detain her.

"I suppose we may as well have this out here," he said at last, "since this gross intrusion has taken place."

Ida looked him up and down. His hands were crossed behind him, his feet planted apart in an

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easy posture, and the expression of his face had changed to one of cold endurance. She could not help reading contempt in those eyes which had once regarded her so ardently. He was splendidly handsome, and his beauty appealed to her the more that it was drifting beyond her grasp. She felt a sharp pang of loss.

"You could have made a quarrel with me in some easier way, a more creditable way, than this," he added quietly.

"I had no desire to quarrel with you," she returned, panting, "but I was carried away when I saw you come in here. It maddened me, I tell you. If what I charged upon Olive Carlyle is not true, why did you write me that letter?"

The vein stood out once more in Van Kirk's forehead. "I will talk with you, provided you do not mention Miss Carlyle again; otherwise not. Do you agree?"

Mrs. Fuller ground her small teeth together, but after an instant she made a haughty gesture of acquiescence.

Her companion waited a little; then proceeded with impassive coldness. "It was about a year ago now that you began playing fast and loose with me. In the winter I asked you to marry me. I thought — but never mind what I thought. To-day we deal with facts. Shortly after I gained your consent, I discovered that I had done so under false pretenses. I was a good deal upset by it, but I waited. You waited too, because you thought

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me sufficiently enslaved to comply with your demand and accept another's charity."

Ida took a step forward. "I waited because I loved you, Max," she exclaimed with a passionate gesture. Her cheeks were glowing, her eyes misty, her breast rising and falling with her ungoverned breathing.

He stopped and looked at her with surprise and a shade of curiosity; then she winced and started back as though she had been stung, for he laughed, — laughed with apparently real and spontaneous amusement.

She covered her burning face with her hands.

"As I was saying," he continued, in the same cool tone as though there had been no interruption, "we both waited, but the situation was unpleasant for us both. I had, rather slowly, I admit, arrived at an understanding of your state of mind. It seemed unprofitable to continue the — arrangement, and so you have, briefly stated, the reason why I wrote you that letter."

Mrs. Fuller dropped her hands and regarded him.

"Offering me my freedom, but really hoping for your own!"

"Oh, yes," returned Max, in a matter-of-fact tone, at striking variance with her intensity. He was so deeply, concentratedly angry that he was unscrupulous.

"Ah," she breathed, shrinking, but in a moment she drew herself up. "Supposing I will not free you?" she said hardily.

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"Then, I should regret the necessity, of course, but I should be obliged to free myself."

"And you call yourself a man of honor," she answered, with slow, incisive scorn.

"You have canceled all my obligations to-day. I supposed I asked a lady to marry me. Do you think I should be expected to sit every day at table opposite a person whose true level is the Bowery?"

The woman confronting him bit her lip till the blood tinged it. "Maxwell Van Kirk, I hate you," she said, low and furiously.

"I have n't a doubt of it," he returned, balancing forward and back in his easy attitude. "I imagine your gifts fit you to be a very good hater. Now, may I understand that hating me — which would surely seem reason enough — you refuse to marry me?"

Mrs. Fuller was very white now, even to her thin lips.

"You are a — wicked — cruel — wretch," she said deliberately.

Van Kirk smiled slightly. "And as such I am jilted, did I hear you say?"

Mrs. Fuller crossed to the door, and then turned and regarded him again. "I know you, Max Van Kirk," she declared, "and the last few minutes have made me absolutely certain that the conclusion I at first jumped at was a correct one. Nothing else could explain your treatment of me."

"Pray don't go without attending to that little

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form we mentioned," said Van Kirk coolly. "Jilt me, if you will be so good. It will only detain you a second. Just now it would gratify you perhaps to force me into the alternative, but take my word for it, you will be glad before the year is out if you adopt my suggestion."

Mrs. Fuller's hand clutched the door-handle. She hesitated and changed color. "You are free," she said at last, without looking at him; then without another word left the room and the house.

Alone, Van Kirk adopted that masculine resort, pacing the floor. His mind was so active that for him time ceased to be. He could not have told whether minutes or hours passed before Mrs. Carlyle's quiet footfall pressed the threshold of the wide door leading in from the back parlor, where all winter hung the faded curtain.

"Is it you, still, Max?" she asked, surprised. "I thought one of my lodgers must have returned early."

He started at her entrance. "Yes, Cousin Mary, it is I; and my apology for waiting is that I knew if I went away I should never gather courage to come back here and confront you; and yet — yet — what is there for me to say?"

"If you are suffering because of Ida's words," said Mrs. Carlyle calmly, "you ought to have known that I would not hold you responsible for those."

The tall man, drinking in her every word with

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breathless eagerness, took her hard-working hand in his now and kissed it gratefully.

"It will always be one of the sorrows of my life," he said, "that I am responsible, though innocent."

"The best way for us to do now," she returned, "is to stop right here and never refer to this again. If we do not watch and think of our wounds they will heal the quicker."

"You are right, but I want to talk to you a little, Cousin Mary. I must. Do be lenient to me."

Mrs. Carlyle looked into the excited face and wondered what was coming. Her wound was one that hurt her sorely. She would have preferred that this young man should leave her to seek peace and pursue it; but his good genius led him to add: "I need you."

No one ever spoke those words to Mrs. Carlyle in vain.

"Come," she said, "sit down."

They seated themselves side by side on the old sofa, whose springs were in a state of collapse.

"I have drawn my first unhampered breath for six months in this room this afternoon," began Van Kirk.

"Well?" said Mrs. Carlyle, because he paused.

"I am free. So is my cousin. We both made a mistake, and may both be thankful that we repented in time."

"You may indeed."

"Now Cousin Mary, I am going to shock you, perhaps. I love your daughter."

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"You do shock me. Are you laboring under a quixotic notion that you owe some reparation to Olive?" asked Mrs. Carlyle as coldly as quietly.

The young man smiled a little as he met the eyes behind the spectacles. "You can say a severe thing once in a while, Cousin Mary."

"You deserve it, I fear, Max. You seem to think love between a man and a woman is a light thing."

"No, I do not think so. I cannot resent anything you may find in your mind to think or to say of me, for I have run the whole gamut of self-disgust. If ever a man dragged out existence in the valley of humiliation, I have of late. I would n't live over the last six months for any prize that could be offered me — except one."

He paused and looked at Mrs. Carlyle. It was hard to tell just what her eyes said behind the glasses, and her lips did not speak.

"Have you any more severe words for me?" he asked after a minute.

"I have no wish to criticise you, Max, and still less right. If you made a mistake and have expiated it, I hope you have learned wisdom; but it does not sound like it for you so soon to be talking about another fancy. It is not a compliment to — to any woman."

"Now, Cousin Mary," — he put his hand on hers beseechingly, — "you will paralyze me, if you talk like that. Talk about its being soon! Why, I have learned that months can be years. I am all

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topsy-turvy in my mind and can't express anything as I should, but I know I mean well. Can't you help me out a little? I have grown up with the notion that you were rather fond of me. Are you, — say?"

He looked at her with such amusingly lover-like earnestness and gave her hand so strong a pressure that she smiled in spite of herself.

"Yes, I think I am rather fond of you, Max," she answered. "If you were in any trouble, I am sure I would stand by you if I could."

"If I were in any trouble! Well, that is pretty good."

"I thought you told me you were out of your difficulty."

"But into the fire," he returned quickly. "I am in perfect misery this minute, because I must ask you a question which I am afraid to hear you answer; but it might as well come sooner as later. Does Olive care for anybody?"

The light struck the glass in Mrs. Carlyle's spectacles in the most baffling manner, and she was silent.

"For pity's sake, don't say I have no right to ask," he went on, with still greater uneasiness. "I know she is very much with that young Spencer. He looks like a confoundedly fine fellow, and they say he is one. Are you on his side? Does she care for him?"

"You 're hurting my hand, Max," came Mrs. Carlyle's cool tones. He withdrew his hand

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quickly, but gazed anxiously into those maddening spectacles. "I do not think she cares for Mr. Spencer," she added.

"Nor anybody?" — joyously.

Mrs. Carlyle did not answer at once.

"If there is anybody in my way," he said seriously, desperately, "the kindest thing you can do will be to tell me."

"There is nobody that I know of."

Van Kirk started up and walked down the room, and returning, seated himself again by Mrs. Carlyle.

"Long back in the winter — how very long it seems," he began, "I used to come in here and spend an evening, and be dull and gloomy, a selfish bore and a nuisance. I 've seen it plainly enough since. Olive would sing and talk and drive away my blues for the time being, and I was grateful in a way, but I did not appreciate her. I was too preoccupied with a nagging wretchedness which never wholly left me. Seeing her in the new setting and environment this summer, I have waked up little by little to a suspicion of the facts, but not until to-day did the whole blazing truth burst upon me. Whether for good or ill, Ida Fuller's accusation wrought that. Forgive me for referring to it this once. It was sacrilege, profanation, all that is false, yet it showed me the truth. Excited as I am, doubtful as I am, I yet feel comparatively at rest. I know what I want. I know what utter satisfaction would mean. From being

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afloat and buffeted by winds and waves, I am fixed and steady at last, — yes," for Mrs. Carlyle's sudden smile might mean anything, — "even if I do not win her, for I shall have loved and lost the one perfect woman, and I shall maintain my self-respect and have done with sentiment for the rest of my life."

"You are very much in earnest," said Mrs. Carlyle, her voice sounding quiet after this impetuous outburst.

"And have I your permission, your good wishes?"

"You seem to have taken those for granted."

Van Kirk bit his lip. "I love her," he said fervently. "Forgive me if, in the reaction this day has brought, I forget discretion."

"I wish I knew what love means to you, Max."

"I will show you in all my life to come. Actions speak louder than words."

"Olive is not a perfect woman, by any means," said Mrs. Carlyle. "She is the greatest treasure earth holds for me, and the fact that I have listened to you shows my regard for you; but when people think of marriage it should not be with the idea of wedding and enjoying the society of a faultless being. There are n't any such."

"I am going right up there," said Max, rising again.

"To West Point?"

"Yes. Any message?"

"Wait, let me think." Mrs. Carlyle's exterior

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was far calmer than her mind. "It seems to me you had better sleep a night in New York before you go to Olive."

"Oh, I shall not attack her as I have you. I am not utterly imbecile," said Max, smiling confidently. "Of course I know she has never thought of me in any other light than as a brotherly friend."

"I imagine that she knows you were engaged."

"Do you think so?"

Mrs. Carlyle looked at him steadily. "Did n't you tell her something of the kind the last evening you spent there, — during the concert, you know?"

"No." Max shook his head and looked thoughtfully into space. There was very little pleasant to remember in that evening. He could hear Olive's laughter yet. "Why — why — I do remember now that I said something which might have misled her. It was just after I had written the letter to Mrs. Fuller of which she spoke to-day. Perhaps she did misunderstand that. Well, at any rate, I know she is so far off the truth that I shall have to begin at the very beginning and lead up to it gently." He smiled radiantly down at his companion. "I am willing to begin at the beginning," he added.

"Willing to labor seven years?"

Van Kirk gave his head a quick shake. "Seven years would be pretty steep," he answered.

Mrs. Carlyle rose. "Well, I should like to go

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with you this afternoon, but my plans are n't made for it, and it will not be best. Write to me, Max. It seems strange to have a secret with you from Olive, but since you have opened your heart to me, let me travel the path with you. Write me how you progress, will you?" The speaker meant at the very first warning to fly in body to the spot where her heart would be until Olive came home.

"Of course I will, Cousin Mary." He took her hand. "Although I have taken your consent by storm, or for granted, or whatever way it appears to you, I appreciate it none the less, and whether I win Olive or not, I will be a son to you henceforward, if you will let me. Count on me for anything in my power to do to serve you. You have earned my everlasting gratitude."

Then Mrs. Carlyle did something which astonished her would-be son exceedingly. She lifted one hand to his broad shoulder, drew him down toward her, and kissed him.

He flushed red with pleasure.

"It is an omen," he said.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

KOSCIUSKO'S GARDEN.

VAN KIRK had been told at his office in the city that his mother had called there to find him, and that West Point had been given her as his whereabouts. Therefore before he took the train for the post he sent her a telegram.

This was on a Saturday. Inspection had taken the place of dress parade in camp, and Mrs. Van Kirk with the others had been watching the procession, formed by the commandant and his staff, ending with the cadet adjutant and quartermaster, trail its dignified length in, out, and around the short rows of much-braced, pigeon-breasted cadets, giving the young men, their uniforms and arms, a microscopic examination sufficiently thorough to cause apprehensive chills to course down the rigid spines in spite of the July atmosphere.

Mrs. Van Kirk and Miss Bagg had been invited to dine at the house of the superintendent that evening, but when the former found the telegram awaiting her at the hotel, she sent a profuse apology and remained at home.

"I really could n't go," she said to Lydia. "The very thought that that poor, dear, deceived,

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unhappy child is on his way here to learn the truth completely unnerves me."

Miss Bagg assented without any parley. She had seen enough of Maxwell's mother now to comprehend that she was one of those persons who really do "enjoy poor health," who feel that they pay a delicate compliment when they assure a friend that he looks very ill, and take a mysterious satisfaction in adverse circumstances of all kinds.

So Lydia left her now, fairly reveling in woe, and in the parlor of the hotel her son found her alone.

"Oh, my poor, unconscious child," she thought, as she caught her first glimpse of his strong, bright face, and advanced with the tread of a tragedy queen to embrace him.

"At last, mother," he said heartily, kissing her. "How have the months treated you?" He stood a minute with his hands on her shoulders, and looked into her eyes with affectionate interest.

Mrs. Van Kirk's late sense of swelling satisfaction in the disillusion she had in store for him suddenly diminished, and she felt a pang of genuine regret. It was not a pleasant task for a mother to cloud the face that now regarded her.

"They have treated you well," she returned. "I never saw you looking so well."

He laughed. "You never saw me looking any other way, I am glad to say; and if appearances

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are not deceitful, you are in fine condition, too. Just my handsome dear mother again."

"I am pretty well," she admitted. It was something to hear Max call her handsome, almost as satisfactory as though he had declared a fear that she was going into a decline.

"Come, let us sit down," he continued, leading her to a seat and drawing one forward for himself. "Where are the rest of the people?"

"Many are at the concert. There is almost no one about the house. We can talk undisturbed, I am sure."

"Would you like to go over into camp?" asked Van Kirk brightly. It would be some satisfaction to see the flutter of Olive's dress, even though it was in close proximity to the bars and curves of the adjutant's chevrons.

"No, my son. The music would disturb us. What I have to say has no fitting accompaniment in music."

From her tone surely nothing more lively than the "Dead March in Saul" would be admissible, and Max looked at her with vague apprehensiveness.

"Has anything happened to Olive?" he asked.

Mrs. Van Kirk stared at this irrelevance.

"No. Olive and Miss Spencer have gone to a tea and Miss Bagg is at Colonel Wheeler's. All are well," added Mrs. Van Kirk sepulchrally; "but, my poor boy, all is not well with you nor with me. It is an awful thing which I am obliged to break to you. You have given your love unworthily.

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My heart "—the speaker spread her hand over the left side of her black-lace bodice — "aches. Yet it is not too late to save you."

"You mean Ida?"

"My child, you have enough to bear without my reproaches, and yet you can understand that it wounded my mother-heart when Ida Fuller came in to me one day, excited, flushed, a letter, your handwriting, in her hand, and said bluntly: 'Aunt Elinor, I think it is time you should know that I am engaged to Max.' You might have confided in me, I think."

Mrs. Van Kirk wafted rose essence before her son's face as she lifted her handkerchief to her eyes. Poor Max! He had connected that odor all his life with woe and rumors of woe.

"It was n't right, mother. The whole thing was a failure from beginning to end. I have n't seemed to hit anything just right yet; but the lane has seemed a pretty long one, and perhaps it is going to turn. At least, I take it as a hopeful sign that Ida has thrown me over."

Mrs. Van Kirk's handkerchief dropped as she seized her son's arm. "What did you say? Ida Fuller has thrown you over?"

"Yes."

"But you look so bright, my child." Mrs. Van Kirk mentioned this fact as though it were the last straw laid upon her powers of endurance.

"Oh, I am bound to bear up like a man, you know," he answered.

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"When have you seen her? I left her at Old Point."

"I saw her to-day in New York."

Mrs. Van Kirk stared thoughtfully. "Then it *is* the porpoise," she said solemnly and enigmatically.

"Perhaps it is," returned Max cheerfully. "Has Ida been playing mermaid?"

"She is going to marry another man; a richer man," announced Mrs. Van Kirk in awful tones. Had her dearest hopes been dashed in this loss of her niece for her son, she could not have spoken more tragically. "Oh, my poor, poor boy." More rose and more handkerchief were brought into requisition.

"I 'm all right, mother. 'Don't you cry for me,' as the old song hath it. I am pleased to hear of Ida's prospects."

"That is because you don't know how little hair he has. He is bald-headed."

"All the better. There will probably be moments in his career when that fact will be greatly to his advantage."

"He is the fattest thing you ever saw," pursued Mrs. Van Kirk inconsolably.

"No matter, so long as his pocket-book follows his example. Now we have turned a new leaf and begin again. I am going to have a few days up here with you undisturbed. I have told them at the office that the first man who sends for me is discharged. Tell me how you like Miss Bagg."

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"I will never, never let that old man call me 'aunt,' you may rest assured of that. He is something in oil. Think of it!"

"Sounds more like a sardine than a porpoise. Come, let us wish the sardine well and leave him. How does Miss Bagg strike you?"

Mrs. Van Kirk gave a parting shudder and replied: —

"She is a very nice sort of person. Quite unassuming. I like her very well. We have had a little ripple of excitement here in Miss Spencer's engagement."

"Indeed! To whom?"

"One of the cadets. His name is Hemenway. I am sure I hope his people or hers have something."

"I trust Olive has not succumbed."

"Oh, no. Have you seen that child lately? She is simply beautiful. The last year has made a great difference in her looks."

"I suppose so. I felt that I was meeting a new person when we met the night before Uncle Jotham died."

Mrs. Van Kirk shook her head. "What a confusion of ideas the thought of that evening brings up to me! Max, on that awful day when Ida came to me with your letter in her hand, she told me that Miss Bagg wanted you to have the money after all."

"Humph! Did she tell you that? Well, perhaps it is as well. You see now just what an uncalculating person Miss Bagg is."

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"But she told me that you utterly and decidedly refused it."

"I hope it was n't necessary to assure you of that. No; my mother would see that idea as it looks to me, or she would n't be the woman I have always believed her."

Mrs. Van Kirk colored and was silent.

"It is very nice for Olive to be adopted in this way," she said at last.

"Yes; it gives her a new experience. They both enjoy it."

"And it has matured Olive so fast. There is something new and rather sedate in her manner. Perhaps sedate is scarcely the word, but it is very good form, at any rate; Olive used to be a trifle pert."

Mother and son were still talking when Miss Carlyle walked into the room. She stepped back involuntarily at sight of the pair, and then came forward as Max rose.

"I thought I should find Cousin Lydia here," she said, as she shook hands with him. "How often we greet you, Max, either to welcome you or to bid you good-speed."

Certainly her manner was very good form. There was not a shade of the impulsiveness which had met him on the occasion of his last arrival, and she was a fair creature to look upon in her thin evening gown.

Van Kirk almost forgot himself as he gazed, but the gentle withdrawal of her hand reminded him.

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"At the beginning," he said to himself. "I must commence at the beginning."

"You will not have the opportunity to bid me good-speed quite so soon this time. I shall stay awhile," he answered. "Come in and wait for Miss Bagg."

"No, really. Cousin Elinor and you have not met for so long. I will not interrupt your tête-à-tête."

"We want to be interrupted, don't we, mother?" — appealing eagerly to Mrs. Van Kirk.

But Olive would not allow the latter to answer. She shook her head smilingly. "There is tattoo. Bertha must be about somewhere. I must go. Good-night."

When she had gone Max turned to his mother, with an unconscious smile on his face.

"I told Olive of your engagement," she said, in an annoyed tone. "If I only had held my peace she need have known nothing of the mortifying affair."

"Those things always get out somehow," he returned cheerfully. "Better put a bold face upon it and let the truth be known."

In what shape his mother told her news he did not know, but he saw that Miss Bagg had heard it when he met her the next day. She pressed his hand with extra cordiality, pleased to her very heart to have "got him back," as she said to herself. She fancied it was his old, confident, carefree face she saw again.

"Accept my congratulations," she said.

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He laughed. "Would n't condolences be more in order?" he returned.

Although Van Kirk intended to begin at the beginning, he evidently did not intend to defer that beginning. He made it by going with Olive and Miss Spencer to church the next morning.

"With whom are you going to walk?" he asked Miss Carlyle when, service over, they had watched the battalion march away. "Oh, no," he added, as Olive smiled, "my cadet life is not so far behind me that I forget its bright spots. Miss Spencer's intentions I can guess at; yours I am at sea about."

"You are rather presuming," returned Olive, "but I don't mind telling you. I am going to walk with Mr. Bradley."

Van Kirk had been dreading to hear the name Spencer, and his relief was such that his spirits took a bound.

"Shall you be accessible this evening?"

"Yes, I suppose so," returned Olive carelessly.

"Then I shall call upon you. Don't forget me."

He lifted his hat and left the girls.

"Well," remarked Miss Spencer, "if Osborn Hemenway is going to look as beaming as that when I throw him over, I shall not do it. I'll marry him sooner than give him any such satisfaction."

Miss Bagg had confided to the girls her joyous bit of news.

"Mr. Van Kirk's engagement has been a

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strange, secret one," returned Olive musingly. "It is a pity his mother has allowed herself to talk of it to us. We need have known nothing of this outcome of it. The whole matter might have been kept perfectly quiet. It would be kind of you not to speak of the affair to Mr. Hemenway. Let us hush it right up."

There was not a day, scarcely a waking hour in a day, when Olive did not recall the sentence which, falling from Van Kirk's lips, brought about so complete a revulsion in her feelings. "I have written to this woman; soon I shall know the worst — or the best." She supposed then that he meant Ida. Now his good spirits were so unaffected and so patent, she understood that he had probably been restive under his shackles, and that the one good thing he was referring to was freedom. The case might have been the more desperate to him in that he had met and really loved some other woman whom he longed to be at liberty to approach. No view of the case affected Olive, or made any difference in her situation. A man who has a particle of sentiment for a woman objects notoriously to the idea that she should be a sister to him.

No, Olive had fought her fight, and, being a girl of good fibre mentally and bodily, she did not intend to be thrown off her balance because Max had made the disconcerting statement that he had come to stay, and because he openly declared a wish to enjoy her society.

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She could not go on all her life avoiding him. They were connected by the acquaintance of a lifetime as well as family ties. She must accustom herself to him; so the sooner the better.

Meanwhile Mr. Van Kirk, wandering along the walk, had encountered his friend Cary near the corner of the Academic Building.

"Well," said the lieutenant, with a curious stare.

"Back again, you see, Cary."

They shook hands.

"Air enough for you up here?" inquired the officer. "It seems to me you look rather expansive."

"That's the way I feel."

Cary's curious gaze grew into an expression of intense and sympathetic interest. "You haven't got the mitten, have you?" he asked in a stage whisper.

"You've guessed it the first time."

The officer straightened up, smiled, gave his friend a resounding slap on the shoulder, and then gripped him again by the hand.

"Come down to the mess," he said sententiously. "This is the day we celebrate."

That evening a full moon showered the river with silver and cast long waving shadows upon the lawns. Mr. Van Kirk suggested to Olive that perhaps she would as willingly receive him out-of-doors as in. She assented readily, but mentally she steeled herself. Why should he wish to see her alone unless it was to give her some confidence?

"What a perfect night," she remarked, as they

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set forth from the house and took the path which leads past Trophy Point.

"Yes," he answered. "The sort of night to make one forget all his anxieties and remember nothing but the pleasant things of life."

"And they are numerous up here."

"It seems so to me now, certainly," he replied. "I have my affairs — business, and all that — in such shape that I can at last try something of a *dolce far niente* existence with you — all."

"Yes, it is very nice for you," returned Olive.

It was a polite little reply, but it was cooler than the moonlight. Its tone indicated to Max that he was indeed at the beginning, and theory and practice were no more unified in his case than in that of most people. Olive was as lovely as a dream in the silvery radiance that bathed her, and it was tantalizing to be linked to her by the hand upon his arm, and to know that she was near to him only in body.

"You might be a little more complimentary, I think," he returned lightly, and yet with an unmistakable tinge of earnestness, "simply out of deference to the situation, if nothing more. This is so beautiful a night, and it is so valuable a thing to me to be strolling with you in it, you might stretch a point and declare that you like it, too."

A burned child dreads the fire. Especially did Olive dread the hint of that fire which glowed in his tone. It had lured her on to disaster before; now it simply excited her caution.

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"Of course I am glad," she said, with the most prosaic candor. "It is such a nice thing for your mother, too."

They paused a minute on Trophy Point, but the few seats were full. They waited and went through the motions of admiring the view, but if ever a fair vision was wasted on eyes that saw not, this was the occasion.

"So that is the best you can do for me, is it?" he said, as they went back to the path and continued their stroll.

"Why, what were we talking about?" asked Olive, her innocent tone being proof positive that the most honest woman will lapse when it comes to a self-defensive situation of the present sort.

"You were saying that you thought it was very nice for my mother to have me here," returned Max dryly.

"And for myself, did n't I say?" asked Olive, laughing. "I meant to make a correct little sisterly speech. It is the least I can do in return for your kindness in wishing to adopt me."

"Who wishes to adopt you?"

"You said you did the last time you were here. You made some quite touching remark about never having had a sister and liking me in the capacity. Now, don't take it back, for I dare say I could be educated into quite a sympathizing one in time. The next time you compliment me with a confidence, I promise to receive it with the most respectful seriousness."

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"There, now, I have given him an opening," she added mentally. But apparently her remarks had more of a repressive than an encouraging effect. He did not speak for a minute.

All at once, through some open windows in the barracks, there came floating across the moonlit plain the measured, sweetly solemn strains of a familiar hymn, sung by men's voices: —

"Children of the Heavenly King,
As ye journey, sweetly sing;
Sing your Saviour's worthy praise,
Glorious in his works and ways."

There flashed at once from Olive's memory a picture of the Sunday twilight hour of her childhood, when in her mother's lap, her head on her mother's breast, they had always sung that hymn together. What content, safe, happy days those were, when there was nothing to conceal; to suffer meant to cry and be soothed with a mother's loving, all-powerful kisses. Now she had sailed out of that harbor, and skill and judgment were required to steer her bark. Was life a succession of gales to be weathered? The calm, silent night seemed a reproach upon the tumult that arose within her. The distant music, sweet enough on the refulgent air to proceed from an angelic choir, lent a new uplifting to the scene. All deception, all mere conventionality, suddenly seemed petty, like unstable froth that foams and restlessly changes above the steadfast depths of truth.

Why could she not say now: "Max, we are

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both children of that Heavenly King, and coming of such a Father, we should at least be honest. I am so unfortunate as to love you when you do not love me. Therefore I tell you, that you may understand why it is hard for me to be with you, and why I ask you to make it easy for me to avoid you for a time. Give me a little space to recover my balance and educate my thought, so that in the future when we meet it will be disquieting to neither of us."

In the high place where for a minute it seemed to her they stood as they paused to listen, this seemed possible. The words fairly trembled on her lips.

Had she spoken them, we know that joy would have followed, but it does happen sometimes that as well-meaning and good a woman as Olive Carlyle loves really in vain; still she is not sure of it. Had she the man's opportunity to woo, even in a feminine way, perhaps she might win. Education, precedent, the consensus of public opinion, bid her hide her affection at any cost or risk. Will this always be? Is there some underlying spiritual truth which, when the equality of man and woman is otherwise fully acknowledged, will bid the march of progress pause before this supreme and holy place in human life with a "thus far shalt thou go and no farther"?

The counter force in Olive was too strong for the impulse which drove the truth to her lips, but her very nearness to the venture shook her. Max

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felt the hand in his arm tremble, and he put his own hand over it. Instantly she withdrew herself from him. The movement had in it nothing either of shyness or coquetry. It was a vigorous protest, the afterglow of her exaltation.

The hymn died away. The two stood facing each other in the path.

"I shall never forget that music," said Olive.

"No. It glorified the night, and the night glorified it," returned Max. "The boys have no idea how effective they were. Shall we walk on?" He offered his arm with as formal an air as though they had been in the ball-room, and his companion accepted it. That prompt, spontaneous action of Miss Carlyle's had done more to convince her lover that he had everything to overcome than any previous event.

"I don't understand that singing," he continued. "It sounded as though they were having prayer-meeting. When I was a cadet they used to have that on Wednesday evenings."

"I did n't know they ever had prayer-meeting," replied Olive.

"Oh, yes, that is one of the regular institutions. There is always a faithful handful from the corps who attend. It is rather interesting to know how it is kept up. During the first months of a man's life as a plebe, when he feels that he is among strangers in a strange land and that every man's hand is against him, the prayer-meeting is a sort of sanctuary; the one place where he is sure of

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consideration and a peaceful interval. So, many of them attend the meetings and enough of the number stand by permanently to keep the institution going. They may be having some extra session to-night."

"I shall not forget that singing," said Olive again.

Silence was unbroken for a little, then Van Kirk spoke: —

"Have you seen much of Lieutenant Cary since you have been here?"

"Yes, we usually have a little talk with him at guard mounting. He comes up from inspecting the tents and stops a few minutes on his way to breakfast."

"Is it generally known that he is engaged?"

"I have n't heard of it."

"He told me to-day that Miss Bruce said he might announce it."

"Why, I wonder if it is that pretty Miss Bruce, who was here with her mother when we first came?"

"The very same. I don't remember her."

"No, you had gone when he was so attentive to her at the hotel that we all remarked it. I suppose they were engaged then. How she must have disliked to go away so soon!"

"Yes; I wonder what they would give to be in our places now."

Had it not been for that unlucky interview during the concert in camp, there is no telling what

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gentle answer Olive might have made to this suggestion. As it was, her whole nature was alert and militant.

"Yes, poor things," she answered carelessly. "I wish they were."

Van Kirk, unconscious of his handicap, forged steadily ahead. It is a familiar trait in human nature that difficulty of possession lends desirability. He longed more and more with every minute that passed to be necessary to this cool, well-poised maiden who apparently found him so superfluous.

"Cary is the strangest fellow," he proceeded. "He has the wildest notions concerning the relations between men and women."

"That is odd. He seems such a practical personage."

"I know he does. He certainly has lucid intervals, but if you will believe me, he thinks if a woman truly loves a man, no matter how deeply she conceals it, he will feel it and be attracted toward her, — love her, — tell her so" —

Van Kirk's breath here deserted him unexpectedly, and he walked on in silence.

Olive widened slightly the distance between them. His words hurried her heart-beats so, she feared he might feel them.

"That is an odd theory," she said shortly, obliged to say something to fill the undesirable pause.

"Do you believe it?"

"Most certainly not."

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"Nor I, either. It is all very well for Cary to sit serene in his happiness and theorize, but I know it is a lie." Van Kirk's low voice betrayed pain. "I love a woman with my whole heart. I shall love her all my life, and that I believe will last to eternity."

Olive's brow contracted and her teeth caught her lip. She knew that was what she had come out here for, — to listen once more to Max's confidences; but she was not strong enough to bear to hear him say such words of another. Her mother's calm, loving face rose before her. "If it is not for you, not a part of what is yours," she heard her say, "you do not really want it. Listen for the divine music."

Ah, the magic music was playing very softly now, — was merely a breath, and in a minor strain. She was very, very far away from that which had been assigned to her.

"I am nothing to this woman," continued Van Kirk. "She is rich in other friends. If I appear she smiles on me kindly; if I go she nods me a pleasant farewell. Tell me, — you do not laugh at me to-night, and you understand a woman's nature, — shall I tell her of my love and that I hope against hope to win hers, or shall I strive for patience, be content with dissatisfaction, and live for her in silence?"

Olive was still a moment, as though for reflection, but when she spoke her pleasant voice was steady: —

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"If she does not care for you, Max, you will gain nothing by speaking, as it looks to me. If a man to whom I was indifferent told me he loved me and meant to make me love him, I should always be on the defensive against him. I should pity him, perhaps, but not with the sort of pity which is akin to love."

They paced steadily on in the moonlight. Something of the calmness of the night seemed to enter into Olive. After all, her secret was her own. Max indeed respected her greatly to show her his heart. All her life she had been taught that strength comes with right-doing. She did not know whether what she felt was despair or resignation; but it was a passivity that was restful after struggle.

A good and witty woman once remarked when enmeshed in a labyrinth of perplexing circumstances: "I do not see but that this time we are *reduced* to trusting in Providence."

Something like this, only without the humorous sense, was Olive's state of mind to-night. She could not plan even for the morrow. She had been carried through one more confidential interview with Max, and with the days she dreaded stretching before her, she felt neither desire nor ability to prepare for them, but sank to sleep that night too exhausted for tormenting thought.

Unfortunately for Van Kirk, he could not do likewise.

Long after Olive left him he walked like an un-

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easy spirit, and his restlessness followed him to bed. The consequence was that the only sleep which visited him came so late that, when he appeared at the breakfast-table the following day, none of the rest of his party were in sight. The meal finished, he called dutifully for his mother.

"You have not slept well, my son," was her greeting. "You are pale," she added with mournful satisfaction.

"I feel first-rate," he returned rather brusquely. "There were none of you about; I thought you might have deserted me and gone off on some excursion."

"No; Miss Spencer has gone to play tennis, Miss Bagg is writing a letter, and Olive has taken a book and gone out-of-doors to read."

"Rather indefinite," observed Max tentatively.

"Well, I think I heard her tell Miss Bagg she was going to Kosciusko's. She said there would certainly be nobody there this morning."

"What can I do for your amusement, mother? Would you like to go up the river this afternoon?"

It was not in Mrs. Van Kirk's code to admit that she would like to do anything, so she only raised her eyebrows musingly and said she did n't know.

"Think it over this morning," said the young man. "I am going out for a while. Perhaps I shall hunt up Cary."

In his inmost heart Mr. Van Kirk was aware that he should not hunt up Cary. He was in no

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mood to listen to what he termed the lieutenant's optimistic fairy stories. Beside, it was a long time since he had seen Kosciusko's garden. Perhaps Olive was not there after all, but he would like to see the place.

His mother looked after him as he walked down the path from the hotel.

"He is too proud to own it, but he cannot hide it from his mother's eyes," she thought. "Ida Fuller has dealt him a blow."

Van Kirk was quite as low-spirited as his mother believed him to be, but like other moths, he preferred singeing his wings in the candle, notwithstanding the pain, to remaining in the safe uneventfulness of the twilight.

Have you ever descended the long flight of rock steps which lead to the Polish exile's favorite resort? If so, you probably rate his taste as high as his valor.

Van Kirk, when he reached the spot, paused at the foot of the steps and looked about him. A fountain flung its spray high in air. The lofty, jagged rock walls which shelter the nook glistened here and there with tiny trickling streams, and held full-leafed trees and purple bell-flowers in their crevices. Another steep, tree-covered declivity descended to the river, sparkling beneath the lacework of foliage. It was familiar, lovely, attractively quiet, but — deserted. He walked forward and stood by the fountain, and then saw that of which his mind was full.

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A narrow walk skirting a ravine winds in a semicircle at one end of the "garden," and midway of it there was a seat in the dense shade. There Olive was sitting, her head bent above her book. Van Kirk's impulse was to rush to her, but, reminding himself that this was the day of small things, he composed his countenance carefully as he walked slowly toward her. His approaching footfall roused her from her reverie and she lifted her eyes, startled. Excursionists were frequent here, but at this hour in the morning she had felt entirely safe. It was such a relief to see Max — it was such an irresistible pleasure, too — that before she had time to school and repress the involuntary joy, her face grew fairly radiant and she started to her feet, her book falling to the ground. She felt her color change confusingly.

Van Kirk lifted his hat mechanically; but her expression banished his caution. His plan of procedure tottered uncertainly. The light that sprang in his eyes sent a little telegraphic thrill across the narrow ravine to her. She groped vaguely for all she had known so reasonably, so calmly, last night; but the magic music would sound louder, louder, despite her.

He was coming on so fast, she must say something to explain her absurd behavior. It would be sure to crush her to remember it later on.

"Oh!" she exclaimed breathlessly, as he gently took her hands, "do you know I — was afraid you might be — a man!"

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He did not smile. He held her hands and looked down at her uncovered head, and the beautiful summer stillness grew eloquent about them. Nearer, louder, to Olive's entranced heart sounded the magic music.

"Olive, save me," said Van Kirk, low but with intense emphasis. "I am on the verge of disobeying you. See what one glad look has done, my darling."

The girl lifted her head and looked up as a flower seeks the sun; and the gaze she gave him was as though she set him on a throne.

"Max, am I the woman?" she asked at last, slowly.

"The light of my life," he answered, and his arms inclosed her. They stood heart to heart, and the magic music — divine music, the mother had well called it — surged and swelled to a full, triumphant chord of harmony.

Plash, pure fountain! Bloom, flowers! Your purple color fits the royal estate of two souls to whom Heaven itself can give no more.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

HOME AGAIN.

Being on military ground, perhaps it would not be inapt to liken the announcement of Olive's and Maxwell's engagement, in the little circle most nearly interested, to the explosion of a bombshell. No bond of the kind was ever entered into with less assistance, covert or overt, from kindly third parties. If it was any satisfaction to the young couple to make a sensation, they certainly had it to the full.

Miss Bagg, when the affair was announced to her, declared that she should die, and then wept copiously.

One might from this be obliged to arrive by a rather roundabout road at her meaning, for she meant that she had never found life so well worth living, nor been so fully determined to live, as at the present moment.

Mrs. Van Kirk was so utterly overwhelmed by the news that she could not even find its dark side at once. She was mute as she received her son's embrace and kiss, and although she recovered sufficient presence of mind to weep when Olive timidly approached her, she had not yet selected the ground upon which to be a martyr when Miss Bagg joyously pressed her hand.

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"I can almost share your motherly feelings," said Lydia tremulously. "There is no one nearer to me in all the world than these two dear children."

Mrs. Van Kirk was inhaling white rose in the depths of her handkerchief at the moment, but she listened alertly to this. In marrying this poor girl it was possible that Max was doing as well for himself as even his mother could ask. Olive was unquestionably a beauty, and she had a very good disposition, no doubt, and that counted for something. Her resolve was at once taken. She looked up from the handkerchief, and stretching out her hand to Olive, who had been regarding her anxiously, kissed her with stately fervor.

"The daughter of my girlhood's friend," she said impressively. "I could ask nothing better than this. You must forgive me, my child, if this joy has in it to me something of sadness. It is a great and solemn moment to a mother when she knows that she must step down to a lower place in her son's heart."

Ingenious Mrs. Van Kirk! Her faculty for martyrdom had triumphed after all. Olive kissed as much of her cheek as was visible beyond the handkerchief, and promised to try to be a good daughter to her. The girl's sense of humor was entirely in abeyance. She was so thrilled with gratitude and happiness that it made her humble, and she was ready to acknowledge the goodness displayed by Max's mother in giving him to her.

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This interview, so full of tears and caresses, had taken place in Mrs. Van Kirk's room at the hotel. In the midst of it a knock sounded at the door and Bertha Spencer came in.

"What is the matter?" she asked, regarding the moved faces.

"Congratulate Olive," said Miss Bagg, luxuriating in the situation.

"No, congratulate me, Miss Spencer," said Van Kirk, holding out his hand.

"Why!" Bertha shook hands with him automatically. Then she turned and flung herself into Olive's arms, holding her in a long embrace.

"What in the name of all that is sensible," thought Max, "makes women cry so much? Olive does n't cry."

No, Olive had not shed a tear. She had more color than usual, and there was the hint of a smile constantly on her lips, but the great and quiet joy shining in her eyes seemed to shed calmness all about her.

Van Kirk had been mistaken about Bertha. She was not crying, although when she had ceased kissing Olive and drew back to regard her, her brown eyes sparkled with moisture. She had been totally surprised, and the natural pleasure she felt at Olive's happiness was tempered by a slight and reproachful wonder that a girl who had had the opportunity to fall in love with Ralph should have failed to do so.

Mr. Spencer himself was a little pensive when

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later he offered his congratulations. Miss Carlyle was so lovely with some new beauty that he began to wish he had had a little more time, and to fear vaguely that he had made the mistake of his life in not letting the procession of other charmers slip and devoting himself solely to this one. However, that frame of mind was a passing one. He really had n't time to regret seriously, and was soon hurried along again on the tide of business and social requirements.

Without mentioning Ida Fuller's visit, Max told Olive of his confession to her mother, and asked her how they should communicate the news to her.

The girl gave him a little radiant, thoughtful smile, and after a while she handed him a paper. "Please send this telegram to mother," she said. "You may read it."

He opened the paper and saw this: —

It is a part of what is really mine. Can you come? OLIVE.

"What does that mean?" asked Van Kirk. "Is it a cipher?"

"Yes," answered the girl. "Mother talks to me at times in what some people might think was a cipher."

But her smile was there still, and on his way to the office Max studied on the scrap of paper. It evidently referred to some previous talk between

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mother and daughter, and it must have been about him in order to have the reference suggest anything concerning affairs at this moment.

It gave him a very warm, happy sensation to realize that the pure thoughts of the young girl had been concerned with him, and such must have been the case.

Olive had confessed very little to him yet. The time would come when she would show him her side of that evening in camp, but as yet she was in the first exquisite attitude of shyness toward her happiness, which, though succeeding stages may bring a deeper and more sacred joy, has a bloom and an aroma all its own, fleeting, volatile and never to be repeated or recalled.

Van Kirk continued to study on his pleasant problem, and was strengthened in what he eagerly desired but was surprised to believe, — namely, that he had been in Olive's mind perhaps as long as she had been in his, and certainly more consciously and avowedly, since something she had said to her mother made this telegram sufficient.

He had just written the address and handed the slip of paper to the operator when his conclusion was arrived at, and at that moment Lieutenant Cary strolled into the office. Suddenly some link snapping into place formed a connection between Van Kirk's thoughts and the new-comer. That absurd theory of the lieutenant's presented itself to mind.

"Confound him," thought Max, smiling and frowning at the same time; but he came forward

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Cary was going to nod and pass him with a friendly word; but Van Kirk buttonholed him.

"Come out here a minute," he said, drawing him out-of-doors. "I don't want you to hear it from anybody else."

"What?"

"I 'm engaged."

Cary looked at him. "Well, you 'll excuse me if before I congratulate you, I remark on the neatness and dispatch with which you accomplish these things."

"Of course I do not wonder at your surprise," returned the other, with dignity.

"I should n't think you would. If you are n't the victim of mania and ought not to be shut up somewhere, perhaps you will kindly explain why you told me the other day that you were not in love with anybody."

Max's face lighted up. "Precisely, my dear boy; that is just the odd part of it."

"That 's what I think," — dryly.

"Now don't interrupt me. It is due you that I should explain that I was in love, but I actually did n't realize it at that time."

The lieutenant looked at him curiously, and an exasperating smile began to curve his mustache. "'M h'm," he replied, with the familiar assenting sound so elusive of print. "Now, will you kindly dismount from your lofty position and agree that there was some occult power at work all that time you were laughing me to scorn, and that this young lady had selected you?"

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Van Kirk did n't want to laugh, yet he could n't refrain.

"I don't know much, Cary, but it is a great privilege to be acquainted with a man who is really wise. I am so happy that I not only love everybody but all theories. You can prove anything by me. So long as Miss Carlyle" —

"It is n't Miss Carlyle!" The interruption was eager and amazed.

"Why, of course it is," returned Max, with a slightly unreasonable impatience of his friend's supposing that it could be anybody else.

"Then I do congratulate you, for a fact," said the officer, shaking Van Kirk's hand heartily. "She is — why, I could fill a volume with compliments for Miss Carlyle, but I suspect nothing that I could say would surprise you. Just to augment your opinion of my wisdom, I will inform you that you could n't use too much dispatch in this case."

But life for civilians cannot go on forever to martial music. The day came when our party was obliged (one member of it most reluctantly) to go back to the commonplace, noisy world, where one man is as good as another, and where parasols have no affinity for swords.

It was one day in the following September that Miss Bagg, having made an appointment with her lawyer, entered his office. All her fear of this gentleman had vanished, and they were now on excellent terms.

"I have come," said Miss Bagg, seating herself,

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"to talk with you of a plan I have regarding the connections of my family. They have all called on me at different times since I came to New York, and I have their names down here." Lydia produced a large sheet of paper well written over. "I was very much surprised to know that I had such a number of relatives; and although the connection is slight, some of them are poor people, and no wonder, if Uncle Jotham was acquainted with them, that they were disappointed to think he did n't leave them any money. I have been over this list very carefully with Mrs. Carlyle, and she has helped me to facts about the different families. Now I put it to you, Mr. Galbraith," added Lydia earnestly, "what is the use of waiting until I die to make some of these people comfortable?"

The lawyer smiled. "You prefer to see people enjoying themselves instead of knowing theoretically that they will do so when you have left this scene and cannot enjoy with them."

"Yes, that is the idea," assented Miss Bagg with satisfaction. "What is the sense of waiting? A great lot of money has become rolled up into one fortune. By Uncle Jotham's dying without a will, it has all come to another single person. It is so large a fortune as to attract attention. Why, you would be surprised, Mr. Galbraith, to see some of the letters I receive from men who ought to be in asylums, wishing to marry me. They say they saw me leaving my carriage and admired me, or else give some other silly excuse for addressing

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me. Mr. Van Kirk opens all my letters now except those with certain postmarks, and he does n't show them to me at all unless they are particularly funny. One the other day contained a sonnet to my curls."

Lydia laughed so heartily that the lawyer joined her.

"Well," she continued, "I thought if things had gone so far that poems were written about my gray hair, I had better get rid of some of my dangerous attractiveness. Seriously, some of these people on my list are patiently battling with life and have large families, and I want to help them. Please look it over."

Miss Bagg handed her paper to the lawyer, who put on his eyeglasses, leaned back in his chair, and studied it. Appended to the name of each person was the amount Lydia wished to bestow upon him.

Mr. Galbraith footed up the various sums; then he looked over his glasses at his client.

"Do you know you have disposed of fifty thousand dollars here?"

"Yes; it just came out an even fifty," replied Lydia cheerfully, as though the fact was one upon which she was to be congratulated.

"It is a great deal of money."

"Yes; but there are a good many people, you see."

"Those to whom you give the lesser amounts will grumble because the others have more. It will all get out among themselves."

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"Never mind. I have graduated it with Mrs. Carlyle's help according to their needs. It will lift a burden in many cases."

"There is one name here with nothing opposite; that of Mr. J. Wilkins."

"Yes. Mrs. Carlyle said she thought you knew about his affairs. Ought I to do anything about him?"

Mr. Galbraith noticed the severe change in his client's manner and wondered at it. "He left the city considerably in debt," he replied. "He is on the other side of the water now."

"Would he come back if his debts were paid?"

"I think it probable he would."

"Scratch his name off the list," said Lydia decidedly.

Mr. Galbraith drew his pencil through the name and wondered more than ever. "I feel rather sorry for Wilkins. He is paying dear for his overconfidence," he remarked quietly.

Miss Bagg jumped to the conclusion that the lawyer referred to Wilkins's confidence in his treatment of herself.

"Don't you think he ought to?" she asked.

"We are all liable to mistakes. Mr. Wilkins is not perhaps an admirable figure, but he is growing elderly, and his situation is anything but pleasant."

"I will pay his debts, if you advise it," said Miss Bagg shortly.

They had some further conference on the subject,

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and the outcome of the talk was that Mr. Wilkins's liabilities should be met, but that he should be warned that never under any circumstances would Miss Bagg consent to meet *him*.

This subject disposed of, Mr. Galbraith remarked with a smile: —

"I do not see your friend Mrs. Carlyle's name here. I believe her circumstances are very limited."

Miss Bagg smiled back at him with a curious expression.

"My plans for Mrs. Carlyle are on a different scale from these gifts," she replied. "I do not know whether you have heard that Mr. Van Kirk is engaged to Mrs. Carlyle's daughter?"

"Yes, I have heard of it. It is not a brilliant match."

"Have you ever seen Miss Carlyle?"

"I am not sure whether I have or not."

"Then you have n't," returned Lydia shortly. "Mr. Galbraith, it is very strange to me how people calculate everything from a money basis. What is a brilliant match, if it is n't marrying an unusually beautiful and good girl?"

"I know it, I know it," admitted the lawyer, nodding his head several times.

"They could live in some cozy little way on their six thousand dollars a year and be as happy as birds," continued Lydia, "and yet plenty of Mr. Van Kirk's acquaintances right here in this New York babel would pity them if they did."

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Mr. Galbraith nodded assent.

"But I am not going to give anybody an opportunity to pity those young people, no matter from what foolish standpoint," she went on. "I am a rich woman?"

"A very rich woman," assented the lawyer, with a smile.

"I can afford to indulge myself in a little amusement. Very well, Olive and Mr. Van Kirk — Max, he says I must call him — are my amusement. He is the most obstinate individual that ever was born. I tried my best to get him to take Uncle Jotham's money" —

"Indeed!" ejaculated the lawyer, with interest and surprise.

"Why, of course I did as soon as I knew he ought to have had it."

"Well, Miss Bagg, you are an extraordinary woman."

"I?" said Lydia in surprise. "I am the most commonplace woman in the world. Well, he would n't. Now it is left me to make Miss Carlyle a wedding present. I told Mr. Van Kirk so, and he said I must look out and not give Olive so much as to turn him into a fortune-hunter. We have arranged that after the young people are married Mrs. Carlyle is to live with me. I am going to settle some money both on her and Mrs. Van Kirk on the wedding-day."

"How about Mrs. Fuller?"

Miss Bagg smiled. "She is not Mrs. Fuller

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any longer. She has married a great deal larger fortune than I should feel inclined to give her."

"Well, I am glad you have reached the end of the list. When you come down to figures and tell me the precise division you intend to make with these pet friends of yours, it will be time for me to see that you leave yourself something."

Miss Bagg laughed, and then grew serious. "No, I do not mean to do anything foolish," she said. "I feel that it is not a light thing to have the care of such a power for good or evil as money is. I consider myself more than fortunate to have two advisers like yourself and Mrs. Carlyle. I will have another talk with you soon regarding the larger amounts I want to give. You will see to this other matter?" She indicated a little heap of checks which she had signed.

"It will be a very pleasant duty," replied Mr. Galbraith as he bowed her out.

Once more there was a party in Jotham Bagg's old drawing-room. It was Christmas eve, and the occasion was Olive's wedding. She and her mother had been for some weeks domesticated in Miss Bagg's home. So much space has been given to describing fair brides that it seems like redundancy to say when this one turned around, her veil thrown back, to face her friends after the ceremony, that Olive Van Kirk was more beautiful than Miss Carlyle had ever been. Miss Bagg made up her mind that, notwithstanding any

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amount of protest and chaff from Max, she would have a picture of them both as they looked now together. It was her devout belief that no couple like them had ever been seen outside the covers of a good old fairy tale, where the prince and princess are nothing if not superlative.

The wedding had been a very quiet one. The company were not all those whom Uncle Jotham used to gather together, but beside some relatives there was Miss Spencer who, looking very pretty, had stood near the bride and held her bouquet, while Max put the ring on Olive's finger, afterward kissing the emblem in a reverent fashion.

Mr. Hemenway and Ralph Spencer were present, enjoying the pomp and state of their citizens' dress-suits as only habitual wearers of brass buttons can. Lieutenant Cary and Miss Bruce were there also. Mrs. Carlyle, in rich gray satin and lace, stood looking at the bride and groom, her eyes beaming with the same love and tenderness behind the gold-bowed glasses that had formerly shone through the humble steel spectacles.

But Mrs. Van Kirk. Who shall describe how she posed and rustled? One thing is certain, — she was as happy as it was possible for her to be under circumstances in which, try as she might, she searched in vain for a flaw.

Whether Miss Bagg had any ulterior object is not known, but in the profusion of lilies, and roses of all depths of color that bloomed from every possible spot in the large rooms, the odor of white rose was lost.

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How happy Miss Bagg was as she flew about among her guests, her curls a-flutter with excitement! Nora stood outside a half-open door, where she could see and not be seen, and wipe her eyes to her heart's content.

"'T is a shame the poor Joodge can't see her," she muttered, gazing at the white-robed bride. "She looks like one o' the saints, and Mr. Van Kirruk he do look a match for her."

At a long table, glowing with soft and rosy lights, the guests after a time sat down to supper, and the ease and gayety of the company took its tone from the simple, loving good-will of the beaming hostess.

Mr. Galbraith was one of the circle, and as he made mental notes of the occasion, he thought of his old client and wondered if Jotham Bagg would not be content could he look now into his once grim dining-room and see it thus transformed with the flowers, the bright faces, and the happy sphere that filled it. Surely so, since the happiest face there was that of his boy Max, his pride and his one joy.

When finally farewells were being said, and Olive and Max were about starting for an expedition to the blossoming south, Lydia kissed the bride very tenderly and then took Van Kirk's hand in both her own where they stood, a little apart.

"God bless you," she said solemnly, looking up at him. After a moment she continued: "I

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have not done anything for you to-day, — not given you, personally, any gift adequate to show you or others what I feel for you — you would not let me; but it is all in my heart. I wish there were something more I could do."

"I know that," returned Max, and he stooped and kissed her. "I feel a gratitude to you that I can never express, but I hope you will believe that it exists." He smiled into her eyes and pressed her hands warmly. "I ask no better lot than to serve you. Continue to give me that privilege and it will be enough. Let me be all my life what I am now, — Miss Bagg's secretary."

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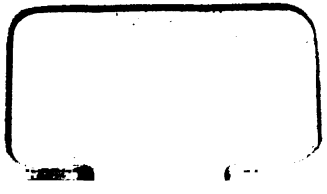
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